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The phenomenon of the personality cult — a historical perspective

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language. Thus Luther put on the mask of the Apostle Paul, the Revolution of 1789–1814 draped itself alternately in the guise of the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, and the Revolution of 1848 knew nothing better to do than to parody, now 1789, now the revolutionary tradition of 1793–95.

Karl Marx[1]

Every period has its great men, and if these are lacking, it invents them.

Claude Adrien Helvétius[2]

1 Karl Marx, '18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte. Karl Marx 1852,' *Marxists Internet Archive*, www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm (accessed 4 Jul. 2011).

2 Helvétius, quoted in Leon Trotskii, *My life*, www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/mylife/ch41.htm (accessed 2 Nov. 2016).

Before turning to an examination of the way in which the image of Stalin was marketed in propaganda posters during his leadership, it is necessary to define some key terms and to explore some of the central concepts that enhance understanding of the intent and context for Soviet propaganda. In establishing what is meant by the term 'personality cult', it becomes evident that the production of propaganda for the masses is a defining component of this phenomenon. Modern personality cults are possible due to the capability to disseminate images of the leader and his[3] achievements over wide distances and to saturate public space with cult products. Further exploration of the features of personality cults will lead to the concept of political religion in which secular ideology becomes a matter of faith and the citizenry a community of believers. An understanding of political religions helps to explain the persistence of so many religious forms and rituals in a society committed to atheism.

It is important to note that the cult of Stalin did not exist in isolation and was, in fact, part of a broader network of cults that both preceded Stalin's and coexisted with it, and which also had historical precedents dating back to ancient times. By examining the cult of Stalin in the context of other leader and personality cults, it becomes evident that the cult of Stalin was not an extraordinary phenomenon that arose under a particular political system at a particular time in history, but part of a long tradition. There was a degree of inevitability about the rise of a charismatic leader cult in an uprooted society that needed to industrialise rapidly whilst surrounded by largely hostile forces.

Definition of the term 'personality cult'

The phenomenon of the personality cult has been studied across a variety of disciplines and from numerous hypothetical and research perspectives. It has been explored as a historical phenomenon,[4]

3 Since most leaders with personality cults are male, I will use the masculine pronoun. Jan Plamper argues that a defining feature of the modern personality cult is that the cult leader is male (*The Stalin cult: a study in the alchemy of power*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2012, p. 25).

4 For example, Jost Dulffer, 'Bonapartism, fascism and National Socialism', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 11:4, 1976, pp. 1109–28; Maria Chamberlin, 'Charismatic leaders: Napoleon, Stalin, Mao Zedong and Kim Il Sung', Masters thesis, California State University, 2010, gradworks.umi.com/14/87/1487113.html (accessed 2 Nov. 2016); J.O. Hertzler, 'Crises and dictatorships', *American Sociological Review*, 5:2, 1940, pp. 157–69; Mattei Dogan, 'Comparing

as a manifestation of politics as religious faith,[5] from a psychological perspective,[6] through the lens of leadership studies,[7] and as a mass media phenomenon.[8] Studies have focused on the personality of the leader; the characteristics of the followers; the nature of the relationship between the leader and followers; the mechanisms that generate and maintain the personality cult; the causes of the cult; the effects of the cult; and the art, literature, architecture and science generated by societies of which a personality cult is a feature.

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two charismatic leaders: Ataturk and de Gaulle', *Comparative Sociology*, 6, 2007, pp. 75–84; Wale Adebanwi, 'The cult of Awo: the political life of a dead leader', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 46:3, 2008, pp. 335–60; Karl Marx, '18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte'; Dragoș C. Mateescu, 'Kemalism in the era of totalitarianism: a conceptual analysis,' *Turkish Studies*, 7:2, 2006, pp. 225–41; Hans Kohn, 'Napoleon and the age of nationalism', *Journal of Modern History*, 22:1, 1950, pp. 21–37; Dankart A. Rustow, 'Atatűrk as founder of a state', *Daedalus*, 97:3, *Philosophers and kings: studies in leadership*, 1968, pp. 793–828; Balāzs Apor, Jan C. Behrends, Polly Jones & E.A. Rees, *The leader cult in communist dictatorships: Stalin and the Eastern Bloc*, Hampshire, Palgrave, 2004; Robert C. Tucker, *Stalinism: essays in historical interpretation*, New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 1977.

5 For example, Peter Lambert & Robert Mallett, 'Introduction: the heroisation–demonisation phenomenon in mass dictatorships', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 8:3–4, 2007, pp. 453–63; Roger Eatwell, 'Introduction: new styles of dictatorship and leadership in interwar Europe', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 7:2, 2006, pp. 127–37; Antonio Costa Pinto & Stein Ugelvik Larsen, 'Conclusion: fascism, dictators and charisma', *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 7:2, 2006, pp. 251–57; Emilio Gentile & Robert Mallett, 'The sacralisation of politics: definitions, interpretations and reflections on the question of secular religion and totalitarianism', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 1:1, 2000, pp. 18–55.

6 For example, Josep R. Llobera, *The making of totalitarian thought*, Oxford, Berg, 2003; Bruce Mazlish, 'Group psychology and problems of contemporary history', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 3:2, 1968, pp. 163–77; Michael D. Mumford, Jazmine Espejo, Samuel T. Hunter, Katrina E. Bedell-Avers, Dawn L. Eubanks & Shane Connelly, 'The sources of leader violence: a comparison of ideological and non-ideological leaders', *The Leadership Quarterly*, 18, 2007, pp. 217–35; David Luck, 'Psycholinguistic approach to leader personality: Hitler, Stalin, Mao and Liu Shao Ch'i', *Soviet Studies*, 30:4, 1978, pp. 491–515; Robert C. Tucker, 'The rise of Stalin's personality cult', *American Historical Review*, 84, 1979, pp. 347–66.

7 For example, Deanne N. Den Hartog, Robert J. House, Paul J. Hanges, S. Antonio Ruiz-Quintanilla, 'Culture specific and cross-culturally generalizable implicit leadership theories: are attributes of charismatic / transformational leadership universally endorsed?', *Leadership Quarterly*, 10:2, 1999, pp. 219–56; Robert J. House & Jane M. Howell, 'Personality and charismatic leadership', *Leadership Quarterly*, 3:2, 1992, pp. 81–108; Jill M. Strange & Michael D. Mumford, 'The origins of vision: charismatic versus ideological leadership', *The Leadership Quarterly*, 13, 2002, pp. 343–77; Robert C. Tucker, 'The theory of charismatic leadership', *Daedalus*, 97:3, 1968, pp. 731–56.

8 Hans Speier, 'The truth in hell: Maurice Joly on modern despotism', *Polity*, 10:1, 1977, pp. 18–32; Plamper, *The Stalin cult*; Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in power: the revolution from above, 1928–1941*, New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 1990.

The term 'cult' came to be coupled with the term 'personality' in modern European languages in the first half of the 19th century,[9] although it does not seem to have appeared in the Russian language until much later. It is frequently claimed that the term '*Kul't lichnosti*'[10] was first used in Russia in Nikita Krushchev's 1956 Secret Speech to the Twentieth Party Congress of the VKP(b), in which he denounced the 'cult of the individual' surrounding the then-deceased Stalin;[11] although Georgi Malenkov, who very briefly succeeded Stalin as premier and first secretary of the Communist Party, used the term in relation to Stalin shortly after Stalin's death in April 1953, in a speech to the Central Committee.[12] Personality cults were seen as inherently anti-Marxist, with Marx and Friedrich Engels speaking out in 1877 against the aggrandisement that was occurring around them as their fame grew.[13]

The precise definition given to the term personality cult varies slightly according to historical era, and also to the discipline and orientation of the writer, although the differences in usage across academic fields are subtle. In general, the most well-known examples of leaders with personality cults — for example, Stalin, Mao Zedong, Adolf Hitler, Napoleon Bonaparte, Maximilian I, Caesar Augustus and Alexander

9 Jan Plamper, 'Introduction', in Klaus Heller & Jan Plamper, *Personality cults in Stalinism* (eds), Goittingen, V&R Unipress, 2004, p. 22.

10 Meaning cult of personality / cult of the individual.

11 Nikita Krushchev, 'Speech to 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U.', 24–25 Feb. 1956, www.marxists.org/archive/khrushchev/1956/02/24.htm (accessed 2 Nov. 2016).

12 'By order of the Praesidium, I find it necessary to put in front of you one basic question, having great meaning for the future strengthening and cohesion of the leadership of our Party and the Soviet government. I am speaking about the question of the incorrect, un-Marxist understanding of the role of personality in history, which, I must clearly say, has received widespread distribution among us, and as a result has turned into the harmful propaganda of the cult of personality. It is unnecessary to prove that such a cult has nothing in common with Marxism and seems to have come from something else' (Georgi Malenkov, cited in Karl E. Loewenstein (trans.), 'Ideology and ritual: how Stalinist rituals shaped the thaw in the USSR, 1953–4', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 8:1, 2007, pp. 93–114, p. 99). See also Mark Kramer, 'Political violence in the USSR', in Robert Conquest & Paul Hollander (eds), *Political violence: belief, behaviour and legitimation*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2008, p. 73.

13 'Neither of us [here Marx refers to Engels as well as himself] cares a straw for popularity. Let me cite one proof of this: such was my aversion to the personality cult that at the time of the International, when plagued by numerous moves — originating from various countries — to accord me public honour, I never allowed one of these to enter the domain of publicity, nor did I ever reply to them, save with an occasional snub. When Engels and I first joined the secret communist society, we did so only on condition that anything conducive to a superstitious belief in authority be eliminated from the Rules' (Karl Marx, 'Letter to Wilhelm Blos in Hamburg, London, 10 November 1877', in 'Letters: Marx – Engels correspondence 1877', marxists.anu.edu.au/archive/marx/works/1877/letters/77_11_10.htm (accessed 2 Nov. 2016)).

the Great — are equally identifiable as such by 'the man in the street', as by specialists across a number of disciplines. An examination of some of the definitions of the term informs what is encompassed by this concept. Historian Jan Plamper begins by outlining the history of the word 'cult', from its origins with religious and ritualistic usage in Ancient Roman times, to the semantic shift in meaning when coupled with secular referents during the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. He sees the Romantic era's 'cult of genius' as being the closest predecessor to the 'cult of personality', manifesting in acts of appreciation, such as the erection of public statues of Johann von Goethe and the holding of a Friedrich Schiller festival in 1839.[14]

According to historian E.A. Rees, who here uses the term 'leader cult', but is essentially talking about the same phenomenon:

> A leader cult is an established system of veneration of a political leader, to which all members of society are expected to subscribe, a system that is omnipresent and ubiquitous and one that is expected to persist indefinitely. It is thus a deliberately constructed and managed mechanism, which aims at the integration of the political system around the leader's persona.[15]

Political scientist Pao-min Chang has described the personality cult as 'the artificial elevation of the status and authority of one man … through the deliberate creation, projection and propagation of a godlike image'.[16] Historian Árpad von Klimó believes that personality cults should be viewed as secularised forms of religious rituals and adds: 'Here we define "cult of personality" as a sum of symbolic actions and texts which express and ritualise the particular meanings ascribed to a particular person in order to incorporate an imagined community.'[17] In a similar vein, Plamper defines the generally accepted usage of personality cult as 'god-like glorification of a modern political leader with mass media techniques, and excessive glorification of this leader'.[18] Key features of each of these definitions are the elevation

14 Plamper, in Heller & Plamper, *Personality cults in Stalinism*, pp. 22–23.

15 E.A. Rees, 'Introduction: leader cults: varieties, preconditions and functions', in Apor et al., *The leader cult in communist dictatorships*, p. 4.

16 Pao-min Chang, quoted in Jeremy Taylor, 'The production of the Chiang Kai-shek personality cult, 1929–1975', *The China Quarterly*, 185, 2006, pp. 96–110 (no page no.).

17 Árpad von Klimó, '"A very modest man": Béla Illés, or how to make a career through the leader cult', in Apor et al., *The leader cult in communist dictatorships*, p. 47.

18 Plamper, in Heller & Plamper, *Personality cults in Stalinism*, p. 33.

and glorification of an individual, the use of symbolism and ritual,[19] the fact that the image or persona of the leader is manufactured and heavily managed, the use of mass media for the dissemination of the cult,[20] and parallels to religious phenomena.

Political religions

The concept of 'political religion' is central to any analysis of charismatic leadership, and to an understanding of personality cults in particular. As previously noted, the term 'cult' derives from a specifically religious connotation, and personality cults surrounding political leaders share much common ground with religious worship.[21] As historian Marina Cattaruzza explains, the term 'political religion' is today almost always associated with the authoritarian regimes of the 1930s — Stalin's Russia, Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy.[22] Political religions are phenomena of the modern era, 'developing only after the construction of a political sphere independent from religion and after religion had been turned into a private matter, relegated

19 As Christel Lane indicates, there is wide disagreement across a number of disciplines as to how the word 'ritual' is defined. Lane's definition of the term serves adequately the purposes of this book: 'Ritual … is a stylized, repetitive, social activity which, through the use of symbolism, expresses and defines social relations. Ritual activity occurs in a social context where there is ambiguity or conflict about social relations, and it is performed to resolve or disguise them. Ritual can be religious or secular' (*The rites of rulers: ritual in industrial society: the Soviet case*, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 11).

20 Plamper distinguishes between modern personality cults and their premodern predecessors on the basis of five characteristics: modern personality cults derive their legitimacy from 'the masses' while monarchical cults were aimed at an elite, the use of mass media by modern cults allows a far wider dissemination of cult products than in the premodern era, modern personality cults emerged only in closed societies, modern personality cults were born of a secular age from which God had been expelled, and the modern personality cult was exclusively patricentric in contrast to premodern cults in which females were elevated (*The Stalin cult*, p. xvii).

21 As J. Maritain has observed: 'Communism is so profoundly, so substantially a religion — an earthly religion— that it ignores the fact that it is one' (*Umanesimo integrale* (Rome, 1946) cited in Gentile & Mallett, 'The sacralisation of politics', p. 49). Statements like that by Lev Trotskii, in which he anticipated the future that mass belief in Bolshevism would create as 'a real paradise on this earth for the human race', which would unite and embody 'all that is most beautiful and noble in the old faiths', borrow from the language and imagery of religion (cited in Timothy W. Luke, 'Civil religion and secularization: ideological revitalization in post-revolutionary communist systems', *Sociological Forum*, 2:1, 1987, pp. 108–34, p. 114.

22 This observation in relation to political religions parallels Plamper's defining characteristics of the modern personality cult as occurring in closed societies from which God has been expelled (*The Stalin cult*, p. xvii).

to a private dimension'.[23] Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce sees religious belief as fundamental to human existence and argues that, when formal religion is suppressed, people will try to form a religion of their own.[24]

The first elaboration of the sacralisation of politics at a theoretical level began in 1762 with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concept of 'civil religion',[25] which was to be founded on principles of popular sovereignty, would replace Christianity, and unite political and religious power into a political unity.[26] The concept of political religion derives from that of civil religion, but diverges from it in some key areas: it is intolerant of and openly hostile to other religions and ideologies, or seeks to subordinate and submerge them; it places the interests of the community above those of the individual; it seeks to manage and control all areas of human existence; and it sanctifies the use of violence against its enemies. Gentile and Mallett state that political religions occur when politics takes on the characteristics of religion by 'confer[ring] a sacred status on an earthly entity (the nation, the country, the state, humanity, society, race, proletariat, history, liberty, or revolution) and render[ing] it an absolute principle of collective existence'.[27] This sacralised secular entity becomes the main source of values for individual and mass behaviour, and an object of veneration through myth and ritual. Political religion is characterised by the existence of an 'elect community', a 'messianic

23 Marina Cattaruzza, 'Introduction', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, spec. iss., *Political religions as a characteristic of the 20th century*, 6:1, pp. 1–18, p. 2.

24 'The entire contemporary world is again in search of a religion … Religion is born of the need for orientation as regards life and reality, of the need for a concept that defines life and reality. Without religion, or rather without this orientation, either one cannot live, or one lives unhappily with a divided and troubled soul. Certainly, it is better to have a religion that coincides with philosophical truth, than a mythological religion; but it is better to have a mythological religion than none at all. And, since no one wishes to live unhappily, everyone in their own way tries to form a religion of their own, whether knowingly or unknowingly' (Benedetto Croce, 'Per la rinascita dell'idealismo', cited in Gentile & Mallett, 'The sacralisation of politics', p. 31).

25 According to Rousseau, the dogmas of civil religion 'ought to be few, simple, and exactly worded, without explanation or commentary. The existence of a mighty, intelligent and beneficent Divinity, possessed of foresight and providence, the life to come, the happiness of the just, the punishment of the wicked, the sanctity of the social contract and the laws: these are its positive dogmas. Its negative dogmas I confine to one, intolerance, which is a part of the cults we have rejected' (*The social contract: or principles of political right*, G.D.H. Cole (trans.), vol. 4, chpt. 8, 1762, www.constitution.org/jjr/socon_04.htm#008 (accessed 24 May 2012).

26 Gentile & Mallett, 'The sacralisation of politics', p. 35.

27 Gentile & Mallett, 'The sacralisation of politics', pp. 18–19.

function', 'political liturgy', and a 'sacred history'.[28] In 1916, amidst the mass death and destruction of the First World War, Antonio Gramsci proposed that socialism:

> is precisely that religion that must destroy Christianity. Religion in the sense that it too is a faith, that has its mystics and practitioners; and religion because it has substituted the idea of the transcendental God of the Catholics with faith in man and in his superior power as a single spiritual reality.[29]

As early as 1920, before the death of Lenin and before the era of the great totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, British Communist Bertrand Russell claimed, after visiting the Soviet Union, that Bolshevism was a religion much like Islam.[30] In 1925 British economist John Maynard Keynes identified Leninism as a new religion[31] and, in 1931, exiled Russian religious and political philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev observed:

> Like every religion, [Bolshevism] carries with it an all-embracing relation to life, decides all its fundamental questions, and claims to give meaning to everything … it takes possession of the whole soul and calls forth enthusiasm and self-sacrifice.[32]

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28 Gentile & Mallett, 'The sacralisation of politics', p. 23.

29 Antonio Gramsci, *Cronache torinesi 1913–1917*, cited in Gentile & Mallett, 'The sacralisation of politics', p. 37.

30 Bertrand Russell, *The practice and theory of Bolshevism*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1920.

31 Keynes' observations are insightful, if somewhat disparaging and idiosyncratic: 'Like other new religions, Leninism derives its power not from the multitudes but from a small number of enthusiastic converts whose zeal and intolerance make each one the equal in strength of a hundred indifferentists. Like other new religions, it is led by those who can combine the new spirit, perhaps sincerely, with seeing a good deal more than their followers, politicians with at least an average dose of political cynicism, who can smile as well as frown, volatile experimentalists, released by religion from truth and mercy, but not blind to facts and experience, and open therefore to the charge (superficial and useless though it is where politicians, lay or ecclesiastical, are concerned) of hypocrisy. Like other new religions, it seems to take the color and gaiety and freedom out of everyday life and offer a drab substitute in the square wooden faces of its devotees. Like other new religions, it persecutes without justice or pity those who actively resist it. Like other new religions, it is unscrupulous. Like other new religions, it is filled with missionary ardor and ecumenical ambitions. But to say that Leninism is the faith of a persecuting and propagating minority of fanatics led by hypocrites is, after all, to say no more or less than that it *is* a religion, and not merely a party, and Lenin a Mahomet, and not a Bismarck' (*Essays in persuasion*, New York, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1965, p. 4).

32 Nicholas Berdyaev, *The Russian Revolution: two essays on its implications in religion and psychology*, D.B. (trans.), London, Sheed and Ward, 1931, p. 60.

One of the ways in which the veneration of man became manifest in the Soviet Union was in the cults of heroes and martyrs. Celebrated figures included Bolsheviks killed in the October Revolution and the Civil War; socialists killed in strikes, revolutions and skirmishes prior to the 1917 Revolution; great revolutionary figures of the past; and some of the towering humanist figures of Russian literature. Statuary, festivals and parades celebrated these famous people in a manner that is reminiscent of the veneration previously accorded to religious martyrs and heroes. As Lambert and Mallett point out: 'At its root, after all, the word ''hero'' conveys an interweaving of man with god. From classical antiquity onward, the hero was invested with powers that were expressly *super*human.'[33] Lenin was a prime mover in the creation of the celebrations and rituals to honour heroes and martyrs, but he viewed these figures as educational and exemplary, rather than as sacred. In a famous tract from 1905, in which Lenin referred to religion as the 'opium of the people', he rejected outright any form of religious sentiment as damaging and exploitative:

> Religion is one of the forms of spiritual oppression which everywhere weighs down heavily upon the masses of the people, over burdened by their perpetual work for others, by want and isolation … Those who toil and live in want all their lives are taught by religion to be submissive and patient while here on earth, and to take comfort in the hope of a heavenly reward. But those who live by the labour of others are taught by religion to practise charity while on earth, thus offering them a very cheap way of justifying their entire existence as exploiters and selling them at a moderate price tickets to well-being in heaven. Religion is opium for the people. Religion is a sort of spiritual booze, in which the slaves of capital drown their human image, their demand for a life more or less worthy of man.[34]

Despite Marxism's atheistic stance, there are inherent in Marxism (and indeed Marxism–Leninism) many tenets that are wholly compatible with a religious and/or spiritual outlook. Marxism promises adherents a utopian future at the conclusion of linear time, in which equality, harmony and an end to suffering await humankind. It also values asceticism, places emphasis on the inner transformation of the individual, and calls for absolute faith and self-sacrifice in

33 Lambert & Mallett, ' Introduction', p. 454.

34 V.I. Lenin, 'Socialism and religion', *Novaya Zhizn*, 28, 3 Dec. 1905, www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1905/dec/03.htm (accessed 2 Nov. 2016).

order to achieve this end. The Bolshevik Party was portrayed as a sacred entity crusading on a worldwide mission of Leninism.[35] Feliks Dzerzhinskii justified the violent actions of the Cheka, the infamous Bolshevik secret police, in terms of 'requiring sacrifices in order to shorten up the road to salvation for others'.[36] In later years, under Stalin, a 'lack of faith', which could consist of the mere suspicion of inappropriate thoughts, rather than actual subversive action, became sufficient grounds for the application of the death penalty. Indeed, it was always anticipated that Marxism–Leninism would embark on a crusade that would ultimately engulf the whole world. It aimed to unite and liberate the entire population of the globe, ultimately abolishing barriers of class, race and nation.

Anatolii Lunacharskii, who was one of the primary young theorists of the god-building movement, saw a humanist religion as providing the emotional bond that would link human beings together.[37] Such a religion was key to involving the masses in the building of a socialist society. In 1907 Lunacharskii wrote from exile, 'Scientific socialism is the most religious of all religions, and the true Social Democrat is the most deeply religious of all human beings'.[38] The term 'god-building' referred to the 'development of the human spirit into an "All-Spirit" (*Vsedusha*)',[39] and this process was to begin with the socialist revolution. The god-builders believed in spiritual immortality, as this generation would be linked to all future generations by the same

35 'The charismatic glorification of the party as a saviour, messiah, a salvation army for a backward society in overwhelming social and cultural misery, gives the *intelligentsia* a mission to fulfil for their "inner needs", a firm conviction to march on the progressive sides of historical development, and an undivided commitment to the holy cause of the party. The fusion of the conflicting demands of "individual heroism and organizational impersonalism" found expression "in the form of an organizational hero — the Bolshevik Party". Leninism became a world mission' (Klaus-Georg Riegel, 'Marxism–Leninism as a political religion', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 2005, 6:1, pp. 97–126, p. 104).

36 Feliks Dzerzhinskii cited in Riegel, 'Marxism–Leninism as a political religion', p. 103.

37 'The faith of an active human being is a faith in mankind of the future; his religion is a combination of the feelings and thoughts which make him a participant in the life of mankind and a link in that chain which extends up to the superman … to a perfected organism … If the essence of any life is self-preservation, then a life of beauty, goodness, and truth is self-realization' (A.V. Lunacharskii, 'Osnovyp ozitivnoie stetiki', in S. Doratovskii & A. Charushnikov (eds), *Ocherki realisticheskogo mirovozzreniia*, St Petersburg, 1904, pp. 181–82, cited in Nina Tumarkin, 'Religion, Bolshevism and the origins of the Lenin cult', *Russian Review*, 40:1, 1981, pp. 35–46, p. 42).

38 A.V. Lunacharskii, 'Budushchee religii', p. 23, cited in Tumarkin, 'Religion, Bolshevism and the origins of the Lenin cult', pp. 42–43.

39 Tumarkin, 'Religion, Bolshevism and the origins of the Lenin cult', p. 43.

bonds that linked all of humankind in the present, but also, for some, there was a belief in the possibility of physical immortality through advances in science. Leonid Krasin, like Aleksandr Bogdanov, believed that science would one day make resurrection possible,[40] and it was the god-builder Krasin who took charge of the preservation of Lenin's body after his death in 1924.[41] From a purely pragmatic viewpoint, if one is to be resurrected in the future, the physical body must be preserved.

It is interesting to note how well this dovetails with Russian Orthodox faith. In the Christian tradition, the embalmed corpse symbolises the non-putrefaction of the body, a sign of holiness and saintliness, which is a widespread and longstanding belief amongst the Soviet public, although the incorruptibility of remains is not in fact a requirement for canonisation in the Russian Orthodox Church.[42] The tale of *Khitryi Lenin*[43] illustrates Lenin's entry into folklore and myth as an immortal who still walks the earth in his embalmed body. The idea that a revered and heroic leader could sleep after death, to be awakened in the future when his country needed him, was a myth found not only throughout Russian folklore, but in the mythology of many nations.[44]

Lenin's domination of the Party line, his railings against any vestige of religious thought or sentiment, and his disavowal of the methodology of the god-builders, were ultimately unable to prevent spiritual and mystical attitudes from infecting Bolshevik thoughts and practices. In 1920, a poster containing the 'Ten commandments of the proletarian' was published by the Central Committee. Perhaps, as Lunacharskii (and indeed Croce and Rousseau) postulated, people need a set of spiritual beliefs if they are to maintain enthusiasm for the tasks of bettering themselves and creating a new kind of society.[45]

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40 The Biocosmist-Immortalist group's manifesto of 1922 reads: 'For us, essential and real human rights are the right of being (immortality, resurrection, rejuvenation) and the right of mobility in the cosmic space (and not the alleged rights proclaimed in the declaration of the bourgeois revolution of 1789)' (cited in Boris Groys, 'The immortal bodies', *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 53/54, 2008, pp. 345–49, p. 348).

41 Tumarkin, 'Religion, Bolshevism and the origins of the Lenin cult', p. 44.

42 Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin lives! The Lenin cult in Soviet Russia*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 5.

43 *Clever Lenin*. See Tumarkin, *Lenin lives!*, pp. 198–99.

44 The legend of King Arthur immediately springs to mind for those in the English-speaking world.

45 In his 1968 Nobel Prize-winning novel *The first circle*, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn allowed the character of the true believer socialist prisoner, Rubin, to be a mouthpiece for this viewpoint:

In fact it was the cult of personality, which was (ironically) built on the foundation stones of Lenin's demise and deification, that was to provide the ideological and spiritual focus for the Soviet regime for the next seven decades.[46] The cult of Lenin and its importance to the cult of Stalin will be discussed in Chapter Two. Chapter Four examines in detail the way in which the traditions and rituals of the Russian Orthodox Church pervaded Soviet propaganda in mildly disguised form, and explores the propaganda value of the image of Stalin as an icon.

Ritual and the supremacy of the collective over the individual

As already discussed, the term 'cult' derives from the religious sphere, but it is important to note that in the ancient world, the sharp differentiation between religious and secular spheres that characterises many Western democracies today did not exist. Classics scholar Ittai Gradel cautions against interpreting imperial personality cults from a modern, often Christian, perspective, noting that the term 'religio' meant 'reverence, conscientiousness and diligence towards superiors, commonly, but not exclusively, the gods'.[47] With the advent of political religions in the autocratic regimes of the 20th century, there was once again a blurring of the barriers between the secular and religious realms, with a corresponding 'reverence, conscientiousness and diligence towards superiors' manifested through ritual and the 'politics of obligation'.[48]

'In the old days people had leaned on the Church and the priests for moral guidance. And even nowadays, what Polish peasant woman would take any serious step in life without consulting her priest?
It could be that the country now needed firm moral foundations, even more urgently than the Volga – Don Canal or the great new dam on the Angara River.
The question was: how to set about creating them?
This was the whole point of the "Proposal for the Establishment of Civic Temples", of which Rubin had already made a rough draft' (Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. *The first circle*. Michael Guybon (trans.). New York, Harper and Row, 1968).

46 As Tumarkin wryly observes: 'It is an irony of history that the god-builders acted to deify human genius in the person of Lenin, for whom all religion was anathema and god-building was particularly repugnant, and that Lenin should have become, by the efforts of some of his oldest friends, the Man–God of Communism' ('Religion, Bolshevism and the origins of the Lenin cult', p. 46).

47 Ittai Gradel, *Emperor worship and Roman religion*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2002, p. 6.

48 The 'politics of obligation' will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

The leader cult and its manifestation through ritual can have a unifying effect on a society, stressing social, political and moral cohesion. Many of the concepts that Simon Price discussed in relation to the Roman imperial cults can be applied, with some modifications in terminology, to the leader cults of the 20th century:

> The imperial cult stabilised the religious order of the world. The system of ritual was carefully structured; the symbolism evoked a picture of the relationship between the emperor and the gods. The ritual was also structuring; it imposed a definition of the world. The imperial cult, along with politics and diplomacy, constructed the reality of the Roman empire.[49]

In a similar manner in the Soviet Union of the 20th century, the personality cult of the leader stabilised the political order and, through carefully structured ritual, provided a definition of the relationship between the leader and the people, and a definition of the world — at least the world as it should be in the imminent socialist utopian future. Jeffrey Brooks sees the 'politics of obligation' as legitimating Stalin's leadership and the Bolshevik regime at a time when 'the officially sanctioned image of the world diverged sharply from the actualities of daily life',[50] and the nature of these reciprocal relationships was often defined and elaborated through ritual, including both semi-private personal rituals to replace the sacraments of the church and massive public street parades and re-enactments of historic events. A number of new Soviet rituals and festivals were introduced.[51] For example, in 1920, the Orthodox ritual of baptism was replaced by the Soviet

49 S.R.F. Price, *Rituals and power: the Roman imperial cult in Asia Minor*, Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 247.

50 Jeffrey Brooks, 'Stalin's politics of obligation', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 4:1, 2003, pp. 47–48, p. 50.

51 Lenin's death commemoration (on 21 January till 1929, thereafter on 22 January, merged with Bloody Sunday commemoration); Bloody Sunday commemoration (22 January); Red Army Day (23 February); Women's Day (originally last Saturday in February by the old calendar, then 8 March); Overthrow of the Autocracy (12 March); Day of the Paris Commune (18 March); Lena Massacre commemoration (17 April); May Day (1 May); Day of the USSR (6 July); Anniversary of October Revolution (7 November); Anniversary of 1905 Revolution (19 December).

ritual of '*Oktiabrina*'.[52] Christel Lane sees the mass rituals of Stalinism as instruments of cultural management that facilitated acceptance of a general system of Marxist–Leninist norms and values.[53]

Soviet propaganda did indeed frequently depict a calm and joyous world, which was observably at odds with lived reality. At the Seventeenth Party Congress, writer F.I. Panferov[54] urged his fellow writers and artists to use their creative talent to portray the peasants' joy at collectivisation.[55] Collectivisation had been strongly opposed by the majority of peasants, who frequently decided to slaughter their animals and burn their crops rather than surrender them to the *kolkhoz* (collective farm). Party officials went out into the countryside and physically forced the process, using terror and inducing famine to ensure that quotas were met. In the posters, paintings and literature of the day, the peasants beam and rejoice in gratitude at the gift that the state has given them. Many writers and artists were aware of the truth, having seen the starving peasants at the railway stations as they travelled the countryside documenting socialism's marvels. Nevertheless, they cooperated with the Party in portraying reality as it should be, arguably working in service of a higher truth.

Because the world celebrated in Soviet literature, film and music appears somewhat at odds with the reality of Soviet life, there is a frequent tendency to speculate as to whether or not participants in celebrations and rituals in the Stalinist era were 'sincere' in their practice — that is, whether there was genuine emotion attached to the words and actions of public obeisance — with the implication that participants took part in such rituals purely out of hope for advancement, or for fear of the consequences of not doing so (or a mixture of both). Price's comments in relation to attempts to understand the imperial personality cult

52 'Octobering'. See David King, *Red star over Russia: a visual history of the Soviet Union from 1917 to the death of Stalin: posters, photographs and graphics from the David King collection*, London, Tate, 2009, p. 168; Graeme J. Gill, *Symbols and legitimacy in Soviet politics*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 74.

53 Lane, *The rites of rulers*, p. 25.

54 Fedor Ivanovich Panferov was the author of the trilogy of novels *Mother Volga (The blow*, 1953; *Meditation*, 1958; and, *In the name of the young*, 1960); State Prize winners *The struggle for peace* (books 1–2) 1945–47 and, *In the land of the vanquished*, 1948; and also held political office in the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. For further details see hrono.ru/biograf/bio_p/panferov_fi.php (accessed 3 Jan. 2014).

55 F.I. Panferov, 'XVII s'yezd VKP(b) Rech' tovarishcha Panferova, Zasedaniye 8 fevralya 1934 g., utrenneye', hrono.ru/vkpb_17/25_3.html (accessed 3 Jan. 2014).

of Ancient Rome from a contemporary standpoint, may apply equally well to our own attempts to pass judgment on the participants in Soviet rituals, coming, as we do, from a different era, and a different political and spiritual milieu:

> The problem with emotion as the criterion of significance of rituals is not just that in practice we do not have the relevant evidence, but that it is covertly Christianizing. The criterion of feelings and emotions as the test of authenticity in ritual and religion is in fact an appeal to the Christian value of *religio animi*, religion of the soul, that is, the interior beliefs and feelings of individuals.[56]

For the Bolshevik Party, touting a Marxist view of history and, indeed, influenced by thinkers like Friedrich Nietzsche,[57] the collective took precedence over the individual. Article 27 of the Rules of the Communist Party states: 'The highest principle of party leadership is collectivism …' and articles 30, 34 and 38 vest supreme authority in the Party Congress, in the Central Committee between congresses, and in the Politburo and the Secretariat between plenums of the Central Committee.[58] In his examination of the imagery used in political religions, Hans Maier describes the transformation in society after the Russian Revolution:

> The people who marched here were not individuals, but a collective. The new human being had left behind his 'little ego, twitching with fear and rickets'; he had surrendered the 'farce of individuality' in favour of a mass existence. His salvation no longer lay with his interior life, his psychic development, and his personal culture. Instead, it lay with the duplication of his external functions, the melding of individuals into a unity. United marching, united action, united struggle, street and field as mass media — revolutionary artists and poets characterised the 'new human being' using such images.[59]

56 Price, *Rituals and power*, p. 10.

57 For an excellent analysis of the numerous ways in which Nietzschian philosophy pervaded Bolshevism, see Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, *New myth, new world: from Nietzsche to Stalinism*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002.

58 Cited in Graeme Gill, 'The Soviet leader cult: reflections on the structure of leadership in the Soviet Union', *British Journal of Political Science*, 10:2, 1980, pp. 167–86, p. 176.

59 Hans Maier, 'Political religions and their images: Soviet communism, Italian fascism and German National Socialism', *Politics, Religion and Ideology*, 7:3, 2006, pp. 267–81, p. 274.

In societies founded on principles of 'the collective' and 'the overall good', the 'interior beliefs and feelings of individuals' may be considered to be of lesser importance and validity than societal goals and the outward behaviour of the people as a whole. Participation in rituals, and the generation and acceptance of propaganda, expresses faith in the goals of the regime, and loyalty to the Party and to Marxist–Leninist ideology and vision. It demonstrates a willingness to bring about change at both the level of the individual and as a collective. Further, as Brooks notes, in societies built around collective principles, the outward manifestation of faith may be more important than the individual's inner convictions, with 'correct performance, rather than belief … most important to Soviet authorities. The significance of correct performance may explain why people were punished for small mistakes, such as printers' errors'.[60] The rites, symbols and language of Bolshevism were so pervasive as to be virtually inescapable, with Stalinism presented as a new form of civilisation.[61]

Implicit in the collectivist worldview is a tendency to categorise people and, as in the Soviet case, to view them through a Marxist lens as members of particular classes, rather than as unique individuals with their own peculiar sets of circumstances. It is almost a truism that the ability to name things and people, and thus to put people into categories, is a fundamental form of political power. Categorisation of people defines their relation to the community, and will even shape people's understanding of themselves. It is thus that, in November 1918, Martin Latsis, Chairman of the Eastern Front Cheka, could state:

> We are not waging war against individual persons. We are exterminating the bourgeoisie as a class. During the investigation, do not look for evidence that the accused acted in deed or word against Soviet power. The first questions that you ought to put are: To what class does he belong? What is his origin? What is his education or profession? And it is these questions that ought to determine the fate of the accused. In this lies the significance and essence of the Red Terror.[62]

60 Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank you, Comrade Stalin! Soviet public culture from revolution to Cold War*, Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 68.

61 See Gill, *Symbols and legitimacy in Soviet politics*, p. 2.

62 Latsis quoted in Riegel, 'Marxism–Leninism as a political religion', p. 106.

Categorisation is good for thinking about human beings, but also good for manipulating, dominating and exploiting them. Many of the propaganda posters of the Civil War period and into the early 1930s were designed specifically to help identify classes of enemies, such as priests and kulaks (peasants), and to conflate members of these classes with monsters, fiends, vampires, or portray them as subhuman. The emphasis on the supremacy of the collective over the individual was also clearly demonstrated in the ritual aspects of the show trials of the 1930s, and in the Soviet ritual known as '*samokritika*' or 'self-criticism'.[63]

This emphasis on the collective and on ritualised behaviour and interactions has several implications for the study of Soviet propaganda posters. First, people, including the leader, are often represented as types, rather than as carefully delineated individuals. A crowd may consist of representatives of a number of typical professions, or a smattering of Soviet national groups identifiable by distinct national costume. These types may change and evolve according to the needs of propaganda and sometimes also to reflect a changing reality or, more often, to reflect the anticipated end result of a process of change that is just beginning. Second, the posters model ideal relationships between the leader and subjects, and institutionalise hierarchy and patterns of obligation.[64] Third, the emphasis on the collective and the depiction of crowds in propaganda posters reinforces the notion of a unified society working together towards mutually desired goals. And fourth, ritualistic depictions employ visual symbolism that is laden with semantic value and which evokes, sometimes at the semiconscious or subconscious level, the rich historical background from which it arises. Traditions in which art is used as propaganda to promote or maintain support for a political leader date back more than 2,000 years.

63 *Samokritika* was an apology ritual wherein an official was publicly accused of some Party infraction and expected to admit his mistake in accordance with mutually understood rules and formulae. Typically, a senior official from outside an organisation presided over a meeting which encouraged criticism of the organisation's leadership from below and empowered those present to criticise or denounce their leaders. For a detailed examination of the ritualistic nature of *samokritika* see J. Arch Getty, 'Samokritika rituals in the Stalinist Central Committee, 1933–1938', *Russian Review*, 58:1, 1999, pp. 49–70.

64 Chapter Four discusses how the visual language of the Russian Orthodox Church is reinterpreted in a Soviet setting in order to facilitate ideal relationships.

Personality cults in art — a brief historical survey

Personality cults surrounding political leaders did not begin with the totalitarian regimes of the last century, nor are they confined to a particular ideology or specific political systems. They can be found in a variety of places and times throughout human history. There are valuable insights to be gained by conducting a quick survey of some of the salient features of personality cults from antiquity right up to the time immediately preceding Stalin's rule. It will be demonstrated that, although many of the features of the cult of Stalin and the accolades and exceptional attributes heaped on him may at first seem to be unique and tailored specifically to the expression of Stalin's outstanding leadership, they are in fact generic and formulaic when viewed in the context of the personality cults that preceded him.

The first known case of a divine cult of a living human is usually dated as occurring at the end of the 5th century BC with the Spartan general Lysander, who was venerated on Samos.[65] Personality cults occurred in the Egypt of the Pharaohs, around Alexander the Great, the Roman emperors, the Japanese emperors, Napoleon, Napoleon III and the Russian tsars, as well as in a number of other imperial systems, fascist governments, and socialist regimes. The use of art to publicise and promote the persona of the leader has a similarly long history. For example, the Ancient Romans excelled in sculpture and, in particular, the portrait bust, the use of which was restricted to patricians. Large numbers of busts of the emperor were created and distributed throughout the empire to be set up in public places and in private homes. Every Roman citizen was required to burn incense in front of the emperor's bust to demonstrate loyalty and allegiance.[66] Caesar Augustus was portrayed in various roles: military commander (*imperator*); first citizen of Rome (*princeps*); and chief

65 See Price, *Rituals and power*, p. 26; and, Frank William Walbank, *The Hellenistic world*, London, Fontana, 1981, pp. 212–13.

66 The persecution of early Christians began partly because of their refusal to perform this ritual of civic duty.

priest (*pontifex maximus*).[67] These roles related to his official titles and duties and expressed the persona of the ruler in his various formalised relationships to his subjects, but were also archetypal.

Similarly, throughout the Soviet Union, every public room or office usually contained several busts of Lenin and Stalin, and they took their place in Lenin corners and Stalin rooms alongside icons. When busts and portraits of the leader appeared in official buildings, they legitimated proceedings and assumed a proxy role for the leader. As David King points out, in the final decade of Stalin's life, and as he retreated from public view, portraits and busts came increasingly to 'stand in' for Stalin in all public arenas: 'The bronze Stalin, the marble Stalin, were invulnerable to the bullets of the "Zinovievite bandits". The flesh and blood Stalin could safely stay out of the public gaze. Sculpture became the real Stalin — heavy, ponderous, immortal.'[68] In his seminal work *Portrait of the King*, French philosopher and historian Louis Marin elaborates the concept of simultaneous presence and absence which occurs with 're-presentations' of the king via portraiture. The portrait of the king invokes presence and the force of legitimation, authorisation, and the power of institution, thereby creating subjects.[69] The power of the king's portrait derives in part from the fact that it simultaneously represents three bodies of the king: 'as sacramental body it is visibly *really present* in the visual and written currencies; as historical body it is visible as *represented*, absence becomes presence again in "image"; as political body it is visible as *symbolic fiction signified* in its name, right, and law.'[70] As Marin argues, the king is only really king in images, and for his power to have substance, a belief in the iconic emblems of his leadership, as re-presented in the portrait, is necessary.[71]

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67 Hugh Honour & John Fleming, *A world history of art*, London, Macmillan Reference Books, 1982, p. 210.

68 David King, *The commissar vanishes: the falsification of photographs and art in Stalin's Russia*, New York, Metropolitan Books, 1997, p. 13.

69 'What is re-presenting, if not presenting anew (in the modality of time) or in the place of (in the modality of space)? The prefix *re-* introduces into the term the value of substitution … At the place of representation then, there is a thing or person absent in time or space, or rather an other, and a substitution operates with a double of this other in its place … Such would be the first effect of representation in general: to do as if the other, the absent one, were here and the same; not presence but effect of presence. It is surely not the same, but it is as if it were, and often better than, the same' (Louis Marin, *Portrait of the king*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988, p. 5).

70 Marin, *Portrait of the king*, p. 13.

71 Marin, *Portrait of the king*, p. 8.

Propaganda imagery in Ancient Rome was not confined to portrait busts. Monumental architecture assumed increasing importance, as it would 2,000 years later in the Soviet Union. Triumphal arches were created as a fusion of architecture and sculpture and, although they could be used as literal gateways in triumphal processions, they didn't necessarily provide entry to anything in particular — their purpose was ornamental, rather than functional. Colossal cult statues of the Roman emperors, some seven to eight metres tall, were also erected across the Roman Empire, on the same scale as cult statues of the gods. Images of the emperor were carried in processions at imperial festivals and on other occasions. All of these practices were to be revived and used extensively for propaganda purposes in the Soviet Union, with statuary reaching heights of up to 40 metres. In fact, a 100-metre-high statue of Lenin was intended to top the Palace of Soviets, which was planned for the site of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, although this overambitious plan never came to fruition. Portraits of Stalin and Lenin (and other Soviet leaders) were carried on poles in processions, and are depicted in this manner in propaganda posters.

The area of most particular interest to this study, the political poster, is perhaps most closely paralleled in numismatics. Darius the Great of Persepolis distributed his image to the populace across a wide empire by placing it on coins. As part of the propaganda involved in their struggle to succeed Julius Caesar in Ancient Rome, Antony and Octavian both issued coins with their portraits situated in the position which had previously been reserved for the gods. Brutus, too, issued coins with emblems of his ancestors inhabiting the place reserved for the gods. Coins struck in Asia feature emblems of Dionysus and portraits of Antony with an ivy crown on his head. Antony identified himself closely and publicly with Dionysus and, like Octavian, made attempts to establish a divine lineage for himself.

Coins were an excellent means of propaganda as, apart from their purely pragmatic use as currency within the economic system, they were small, portable, widely distributed, and often in public view. At times they may also have taken on apotropæic qualities.[72] In *Portrait*

72 See Stefan Skowronek, *On the problems of the Alexandrian mint: allusion to the divinity of the sovereign appearing on the coins of Egyptian Alexandria in the period of the early Roman Empire: 1st and 2nd centuries A.D.*, Varsovie, Ed. scientifiques de Pologne, 1967, p. 74.

of the king, Louis Marin references a 1602 text by Rascas de Bagarris[73] in which state counsel advises the king to mint commemorative coins with his own image in order to miraculously transform discourse into history.[74] The aim of propaganda is to convert discourse to history and Soviet propaganda, in particular, sought to embed the world it represented in the viewer's mind as an already accomplished fact. As with the portrait of the king on a coin, the audience for the propaganda poster is required to simultaneously look and read.

Many of the coins minted with a portrait of the ruler alluded to the divinity of emperors, both deceased and living, using familiar and widely understood symbols to illustrate these connections. Many of the symbols used on Roman coins (and indeed in other forms of propaganda) were those associated with apotheosis, and made explicit visual reference to the divinity of the emperor. For example, laurel wreaths, crowns, ears of corn and globes symbolised divine attributes, and the emperor depicted with his right hand uplifted signified salvation, magic force and apotropæic greeting.[75] Stalin's image in propaganda posters is frequently surrounded by laurel or oak leaves and alongside ears of corn and images of the globe. Stalin is also depicted in oratorical poses with his right hand raised.[76] Stefan Skowronek observes that, for the Roman emperors, divine honours were often only a political tool and, in many cases, were not taken seriously by the emperors themselves.[77] He postulates that the Roman emperors were deeply invested in their political programs, but not in their own personality cults; that is, 'the Imperial cult was not the result of religious impulses, but led to the manifestation of feelings of loyalty towards the Emperor'.[78] I will argue that Stalin, too, viewed his personality cult as a political tool to model ideal relations between the leader and the masses in order to mobilise the citizenry to pursue the goals of the regime as laid down by the Bolshevik vanguard.

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73 *Discours qui montre la nécessité de rétablir le très ancient et auguste usage public des vrayes et parfaits médailles*.

74 Tom Conley, 'Foreword: The king's effects,' in Marin, *Portrait of the king*, p. xi.

75 Skowronek, *On the problems of the Alexandrian mint*, p. 79.

76 See Chapter Four.

77 Skowronek, *On the problems of the Alexandrian mint*, p. 72.

78 Skowronek, *On the problems of the Alexandrian mint*, p. 80.

Historic parallels to, and precedents for, the cult of Stalin are not confined to the Classical world. Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I of Habsburg faced many of the same leadership challenges as the emperors of Ancient Rome, and as the Bolsheviks when they seized power in 1917. Like Stalin, Maximilian headed a large empire with disputed borders, diverse populations and widely varied traditions of local government. A brief examination of some aspects of the personality cult of Maximilian I brings us a step closer to the modern world, as Maximilian was the first major leader to utilise the printing press in the service of his propaganda. The printing press enabled the comparatively inexpensive production of a large number of visual images and text, which were portable and thus easily distributed to a mass audience. By commissioning skilled artists (most notably Albrecht Dürer and Hans Burgkmair) to create, for example, an original woodblock featuring his stylised image, which would then be reproduced in bulk, the emperor was able to influence and control the persona that would be viewed by the public in all corners of the empire.

Images of Maximilian were laden with symbolism, forming a rich visual language that testified to his personal qualities, his archetypal qualities as a leader, his lineage, and the legitimacy of his office. Maximilian did not abandon other forms of art and propaganda for which there was such rich and extensive precedent. Taking his cue from the Roman emperors before him, he appeared in statuary and his deeds were proclaimed on triumphal arches and through the issue of coins. Like the emperors striving for divinity before him, Maximilian planned a large number of public works to demonstrate not only his historical links to the Roman Empire, but also his spiritual and ideological links to the Emperor Constantine, displaying his Christian piety and faith, his leadership qualities and his warrior identity. As Maximilian worried that his claims to traditional legitimacy were not sufficient to ensure a stable and peaceful rule, he both 'beefed up' these claims with some creative genealogy,[79] and also used his manufactured image to appeal to his subjects on charismatic grounds.

79 Maximilian took great pains to establish his claims of traditional legitimacy, investing large amounts of money in 'scholarly' investigations of his genealogy. He asked Stabius to draw up a family tree headed by Noah that included Osiris and Hercules Libycus; and had this genealogy submitted to the faculty of Vienna University where it was found to be consonant with Old Testament scriptures. Depending on political necessity, Maximilian would shift emphasis between claims to be descended from the Trojans and from the Ancient Romans. By grafting his

In another parallel to Stalin's leadership, many of Maximilian's planned elaborate projects did not come to fruition, and records of his intentions survive only in the form of preliminary drawings and woodcuts showing plans for statues and monuments.[80] The surviving drawings and prints for Maximilian's planned great monuments show an extraordinarily rich visual language of symbols and archetypes associated with leadership and divinity, and demonstrate remarkable continuity with those used to indicate the divinity of figures like Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus. It is hardly surprising, then, that we find much of the same symbolism cropping up in the art and propaganda associated with the leader cults that followed Maximilian and, later, in posters of Stalin.

The French Revolution saw the emergence of a number of cults centred around revolutionary leaders, most notably Maximilien de Robespierre and Jean-Paul Marat, who made appearances in propagandistic paintings and a proliferation of portrait busts. These figures were pushed into the background when Napoleon came onto the scene. A brief glance at the cult of Napoleon illuminates the major premises of this book in three ways. First, the art produced in France in support of Napoleon's leadership shows a continuation and elaboration on the themes that emerged in earlier personality cults. Under Napoleon's director of artistic patronage, Vivant Denon, a group of official artists was assembled to produce works that celebrated Napoleon's triumphs.[81] Artists such as Jacques-Louis David, Antoine-Jean Gros and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres painted portraits of the emperor that emphasised his military prowess, his links to the Roman emperors, and took particular pains to establish an ideological but *non*-genealogical lineage by showing Napoleon walking firmly in the footsteps of other great men of the past. It is at this point in European history, where no claim to traditional legitimacy exists, that propaganda promoting the charisma and ideology of the leader comes to the fore. In his detailed analysis of Napoleon and history

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family tree onto that of the French royal houses, he could claim Merovingian ancestry as well (Larry Silver, *Marketing Maximilian: the visual ideology of a Holy Roman Emperor*, Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 55).

80 One such project was to be his grand tomb monument, which was only finally completed by his grandson Ferdinand, some 80 years after it was first begun in 1502 (Silver, *Marketing Maximilian*, p. 63).

81 See David Welch, 'Painting, propaganda and patriotism,' *History Today*, 55:7, 2005, pp. 42–50, p. 45.

painting, Christopher Prendergast examines the symbolism of the trimmings of Napoleon's coronation as a quest to confer legitimacy on his usurpation of the monarchy, without making reference to the Bourbons, by suggesting a lineage that drew on a more distant past.[82] Napoleon reached back to Ancient Rome and also to the more local association with Charlemagne by paying homage to him at Aix-la-Chapelle; by wearing Carolingian paraphernalia at his coronation;[83] by being crowned dressed in a Roman tunic; and, by adopting bees, which were associated with the Merovingian kings, as his personal symbol.[84] Stalin's appeal to a pantheon of Russian heroes of the past, including two tsars (Ivan Grozny and Peter the Great), as imminent war threatened the Soviet Union, and the visual representations of his ideological lineage[85] were major tactics in shoring up legitimacy for his leadership.

Second, Stalin's propagandists employed the same archetypes in their depictions of Stalin as the French artists employed in their portraits of Napoleon. Understandably for someone with Napoleon's military background, the primary topos was that of the Warrior and, like Stalin after him, there was a later shift from the topos of the Warrior to that of the Saviour, employing quasi-sacral images of forgiving, blessing and healing.[86] Napoleon was also portrayed as a 'fatherly' figure, the other major archetype employed in the Stalin cult.[87]

Third, the posthumous cult of Napoleon, which spread across Europe after his death, at times approached the sort of adulation encountered in 21st-century celebrity-obsessed popular culture. In his article on 'Lisztomania', the cult of Ferencz 'Franz' Liszt, Dana Gooley describes 19th-century European society as not only obsessed with Liszt, but also with the persona of Napoleon, with students at the Ecole polythechnique walking and dressing like Napoleon.[88] The cult had

82 Christopher Prendergast, *Napoleon and history painting: Antoine-Jean Gros's La Bataille d'Eylau*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997, p. 35.

83 Some of this paraphernalia was not authentic and was created especially for the coronation.

84 Prendergast, *Napoleon and history painting*, pp. 35–36.

85 Chapter Two details Stalin's appeal to a lineage from Lenin, and also from Marx and Engels.

86 For a more detailed discussion of this transition, see Prendergast, *Napoleon and history painting*, p. 84.

87 See Prendergast, *Napoleon and history painting*, p. 164.

88 'In Paris the cult of Napoleon sank in so deeply that it affected people's everyday behavior. Frances Trollope commented in 1835 that all of the students at the Ecole polythechnique were walking and dressing like Napoleon, and a frontpage article in the Gazette Musicale identified

its origins amongst the Romantic literati in England, then bloomed in France when Napoleon died in 1821, and gained renewed impetus after the Paris Revolution of 1830. The cult of Napoleon became popular in Russia, England, France and Germany in the 19th century and, to a lesser extent, across the rest of Europe. In Germany and France portraits of Napoleon could be found in almost every house.[89] It is particularly interesting to note that Russia experienced a cult of Napoleon, despite its success in forcing Napoleon to retreat from Russian soil in the Patriotic War of 1812. Napoleon's identity as a conquering enemy and his subsequent ignominious flight and abandonment of his remaining men, seems to have done little to sully his reputation as a great general and a great emperor.[90] The cult of Napoleon Bonaparte was later used as a vehicle to power by his nephew Louis Napoleon (Napoleon III).

One of the most elaborate cults of a revolutionary leader prior to Lenin, and perhaps one of the most similar, [91] was that of George Washington, which served in part to legitimate the American Revolution. Washington's cult featured an exemplary (and somewhat fabricated) biography, a plethora of historical paintings, monumental statuary and the appearance of portraits in virtually every family home.[92]

"The Napoleon" as a ubiquitous social type: [Napoleons are] that class, made up of many people in the civil sphere, whom we see overcome with the silly pretention of imitating, copying, and aping the great man … Today the common ambition is turned toward Napoleon; it is he who serves as the standard measure, him who is chosen as the model and type … [There is now] an innumerable, infinite, immense race of Napoleons in all political, literary, musical and industrial categories. Everywhere you go you bump into a Napoleon; the Napoleons travel the streets, in carriage, on foot or by horse, and most often by foot'; Dana Gooley, 'Warhorses: Liszt, Weber's "Konzertstück", and the cult of Napoléon', *19th-century Music*, 24:1, 2000, pp. 62–88, p. 67.

89 Gooley, 'Warhorses', p. 68.

90 In *War and Peace*, Leo Tolstoi laments the veneration of Napoleon at the expense of the conquering but self-effacing Field Marshal Kutuzov: 'For Russian historians (strange and terrible to say!) Napoleon, that most insignificant tool of history who never anywhere, even in exile, showed human dignity — Napoleon is the object of adulation and enthusiasm: he is grand. But Kutuzov, the man who from first to last in the year 1812, from Borodino to Vilna, was never once, by word or deed, false to himself, who presents an example, exceptional in history, of self-denial and present insight into the future significance of what was happening — Kutuzov appears to them as some colourless, pitiable being, and whenever they speak of him in connection with the year 1812 they always seem a little ashamed of the whole episode' (*War and Peace*, vol. 2, Rosemary Edmonds (trans.), London Folio Society, 1971, p. 576).

91 Soviet historian I.I. Shitts cites the cult of Kemal Attaturk in Turkey as being the inspiration for the Soviet leader cults (*Dnevnik 'Velikogo Pereloma'* (mart 1928 – avgust 1931)), Paris, YMCA Press, 1991.

92 See Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, p. 2.

Soviet personality cults

There were a number of personality cults in existence in close proximity to Lenin's era. Trotskii disparagingly characterised the immediate post-revolutionary period as being full of likely candidates for Bonaparte-style cults, just waiting for propitious, post-revolutionary circumstances.[93] In the period before the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in October 1917, there were cults around several leaders or potential leaders such as General Lavr Kornilov, an intelligence officer and Imperial Army general during the First World War, Prime Minister Aleksandr Kerenskii, and even Trotskii himself.[94] Cultic practice in the Soviet Union extended beyond the Party leaders and their potential successors in leadership circles. In the years of Stalin's rule, there was a hierarchy of cults, with the minor cults of other leadership figures, regional figures and, after the war, Eastern European leader cults, orbiting like satellites around the central and predominant cult of the Supreme Leader, Stalin. Other Politburo members, Party bosses in major cities and regional centres, and even the directors of large-scale enterprises, all had their own minor cults and towns, streets, factories and schools were named after them, their portraits were often carried through the streets in celebratory parades, biographies written and distributed, birthdays celebrated publicly and, sometimes after their deaths, their apartments were turned into museums.[95]

The nominal head of the Soviet State,[96] Mikhail Kalinin, was one member of the Politburo who had his own thriving mini-cult. Kalinin was of genuine peasant origin and, prior to the Revolution, had worked on a farm, as a butler and on the railroads. While most of the Party leadership could be regarded as members of the intelligentsia (and were seen to have a vanguard role on the way to the Communist

93 'The misfortune of the Russian candidates for Bonaparte lay not at all in their dissimilarity to the first Napoleon, or even to Bismarck. History knows how to make use of substitutes. But they were confronted by a great revolution which had not yet solved its problems or exhausted its force' (Leon Trotsky, 'Kerensky and Kornilov, (elements of Bonapartism in the Russian Revolution)', *The history of the Russian Revolution*, vol. 2, *The attempted counter-revolution*, www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/hrr/ch29.htm (accessed 14 Jul. 2012).

94 See Chapter Four for further details.

95 See Apor et al., *The leader cult in communist dictatorships*, p. 10.

96 Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR from 1922 to 1946 and chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the Congress of Soviets of the Russian SFSR from 1919 to 1938.

utopia), much was made of the fact that Kalinin emerged from one of the classes in whose name the Bolsheviks governed and he was often photographed in full peasant dress at his village, or at the House of Peasants in Moscow.

Several other high-profile Politburo members had cults as well, including Grigorii Zinoviev[97] and marshal of the Soviet Union, Kliment Voroshilov, whose cult was built around the military archetype until that role became part of Stalin's persona during the Great Patriotic War. Stalin may have been the 'man of steel', but Lazar Kaganovich, who was people's commissar for transport and was responsible for building the Moscow Metro, also had a cult following and was known as 'Iron Lazar' and the 'Iron Commissar'.[98] Nikita Krushchev, Lavrenti Beria and Andrei Zhdanov all had regional cults and were paid tribute in songs such as 'Song of Krushchev' and 'Song for Beria'. Indeed there was even an 'Ode to Ezhov', the dreaded people's commissar for state security who was executed under Stalin in 1940.[99] Vyacheslav Molotov and Voroshilov featured in propaganda posters in their own right, with Molotov taking centre stage from Stalin in one Uzbek poster by Cheprakov of 1939 (Fig. 3.4).

After 1948, the People's Democracies of Eastern Europe, which had fallen under Soviet influence after the Great Patriotic War, adopted socialist systems of government and became increasingly 'Sovietised'. The Party leaders were supported by and answerable to Moscow, and were obliged to adopt the Soviet model of government, regardless of national cultural idiosyncrasies. In each of these countries, personality cults were manufactured around the persona of the leader, making use of many — 'teacher', 'friend', 'caretaker', 'father of the nation'

97 In his memoirs Viktor Serge describes the cultish obsequiousness shown to Grigorii Zinoviev by some members of the public, and Zinoviev's palpable embarrassment: 'A comrade who was a former convict had a sumptuously coloured cover designed by one of the greatest Russian artists, which was intended to adorn one of Zinoviev's pamphlets. The artist and the ex-convict had combined to produce a masterpiece of obsequiousness, in which Zinoviev's Roman profile stood out like a proconsul in a cameo bordered by emblems. They brought it to the President of the International, who thanked them cordially and, as soon as they were gone, called me to his side. "It is the height of bad taste", Zinoviev told me in embarrassment, "but I didn't want to hurt their feelings. Have a very small number printed, and get a very simple cover designed instead"' (*Memoirs of a revolutionary 1901–1941*, Peter Sedgwick (trans.), London, Oxford University Press, 1963, p. 113).

98 S. Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: the court of the Red Tsar*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2003, p. 170.

99 Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 277.

— but not all, of the epithets used to glorify Stalin. In Yugoslavia, Josip Broz took on the partisan name of 'Tito'[100] and was characterised by such epithets as 'the best son of our people', 'the creator of the war victory', and 'organiser of the people's army'.[101] Some accolades were reserved only for Stalin himself, as cultural anthropologist Izabella Main points out, 'only the Soviet leader could be described as "the engineer of history", "the genius architect of communism" or "the great genius of mankind"'.[102]

Writers and artists also sometimes gained cult-like followings. For example, Nadezhda Mandelshtam[103] recalls in her memoirs the 'cult-like devotion' around Andrei Belii, author of the seminal text *Symbolism*.[104] Aleksandr Pushkin and Nikolai Chernishevskii[105] were cult figures during Soviet times,[106] with huge celebrations taking place on the 100th anniversary of Pushkin's birth in 1937. Maksim Gor'kii was a contemporary Soviet writer who also had a cult. Bernice Rosenthal notes that there was a cult for almost every field of endeavour: Anton Makarenko in education, Nikolai Marr in linguistics, Ivan Pavlov in psychology, Trofim Lysenko in biology, Konstantin Stanislavskii in theatre, with films made about Gor'kii, Makarenko, and Pavlov.[107] Lysenko's portrait was hung in all scientific institutions, busts of him were widely available for purchase, monuments were erected in his honour, and a hymn to Lysenko was included in the repertoire of the State Chorus.[108]

100 From the Serbo-Croat words '*ti to*', which means 'You do this', often used by Josip Broz in issuing orders during the war (Stanislav Sretenovic & Artan Puto, 'Leader cults in the Western Balkans (1945–90): Josip Broz Tito and Enver Hoxha', in Apor et al., *The leader cult in communist dictatorships*, p. 210).

101 Sretenovic & Puto, 'Leader cults in the Western Balkans (1945–90)', p. 209.

102 Izabella Main, 'President of Poland or "Stalin's most faithful pupil"? The cult of Boleslaw Bierut in Stalinist Poland', in Apor et al., *The leader cult in communist dictatorships*, p. 184.

103 Widow of the poet Osip Mandelshtam who wrote a scathing poetic portrait of Stalin in 1933 and was later to die in a prison camp.

104 Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Hope against hope: a memoir*, Max Hayward (trans.), New York, Atheneum Publishers, 1970, p. 186.

105 Author of the novel *What is to be done?*

106 For an interesting discussion of this phenomenon, see Evgeny Dobrenko, 'Pushkin in Soviet and post-Soviet culture', in Andrew Kahn (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Pushkin*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 202–20.

107 Rosenthal, *New myth, new world*, p. 387.

108 Rosenthal, *New myth, new world*, p. 419.

The cultic phenomenon was not only confined to powerful or influential individuals. One of the legendary figures of the Great Patriotic War, Zoia Kosmodemianskaia, became the subject of several novels, essays, films and artworks. At the age of 18, at great personal risk, she acted under Stalin's orders to sabotage buildings as the Germans advanced on local villages. She was captured, brutalised, humiliated and interrogated but refused to disclose any information to the Germans, other than giving the false name of 'Tania'. She was hanged by the Germans on 29 November 1941, with her story becoming widely known after the publication of an article by Petr Lidov in *Pravda* in October 1942.[109] Kosmodemianskaia was the first woman to be awarded (posthumously) the title Hero of the Soviet Union in the Great Patriotic War. Many girls have since been named in her honour.

During the Stalinist era, there was even a cult around a 13-year-old boy, Pavlik Morozov, who was allegedly martyred through being murdered by his family after informing on his father for selling false identity papers. *Pravda* published a long series of articles on this story, continually shaping the myth until it became a 'conversion narrative' in which a young village boy tried to lead his peasant community from their backward ways into the light of socialist utopia. Morozov was even featured in propaganda posters, such as the 1952 poster by O. Korovin titled 'Pavlik Morozov'. Recent investigations in the archives by scholars such as Catriona Kelly[110] have suggested that, while Morozov did exist and was murdered, the published story surrounding his death was largely fabricated.

Whether or not cults such as those of Morozov and Kosmodemianskaia were accurate in their details, or partially fabricated, it is clear that their founding narratives were honed and polished to serve an

109 Petr Lidov, 'Five German photographs', *Pravda*, 24 Oct. 1942. The article finished with the words: 'When they halt for shelter, fighting men will come bow to the earth before her ashes and to say a heartfelt Russian thank-you. To the father and mother who bore her into the world and raised her a heroine; to the teachers who educated her; to the comrades who forged her spirit. Her undying glory will reach all corners of the Soviet land, millions of people will think about a distant snowy grave with love, and Stalin's thoughts will go to the graveside of his faithful daughter' (cited in Petr Lidov, 'Tanya', in James von Geldern & Richard Stites (eds), *Mass culture in Soviet Russia: tales, songs, poems, movies, plays and folklore, 1917–1953*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 344).

110 Catriona Kelly, *Comrade Pavlik: the rise and fall of a Soviet boy hero*, London, Granta, 2005; Catriona Kelly, *Children's world: growing up in Russia, 1890–1991*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2007, pp. 79–80.

exemplary and instructional role for the population — particularly Soviet youth in these two cases. In her memoirs, Nadezhda Mandelshtam provides a striking example of the efficacy of this sort of propaganda. During her exile in Kalinin she met a 14-year-old boy who was also in exile with his family, and was said to be distantly related to Stalin. The boy spent days denouncing his parents as traitors and lamenting the fact that, unlike Pavlik, he had not denounced his parents in time: 'He used a formula which had been instilled in him during his very careful upbringing: "Stalin is my father and I do not need another one" …'[111]

Cults also grew up around groups and organisations. There was the cult of the Revolution, the cult of the proletariat, the cult of the Party, the cult of the freedom fighter and the cult of the hero. In the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, fallen freedom fighters were venerated as martyrs and revolutionary saints. They were celebrated in song, poetry, biography and statuary. Their images were carried in street parades or displayed in iconic fashion. The cult of the hero dates to the decree on heroes published in *Izvestiia*[112] on 18 April 1934, which identified the Soviet hero as the 'the best of the Soviet people', those who had accomplished inspiring deeds which in turn were inspired by Stalin.[113]

The people need a tsar

It is often claimed that the deposition of the tsar did not displace the need in the Russian population for a strong, autocratic ruler.[114] Research conducted by Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii indicates that many of the older peasants were distraught at the overthrow of the tsar,[115] who was seen as the embodiment of the life and soul of the nation. His portrait was often hung as an icon and some peasants

111 Mandelstam, *Hope against hope*, pp. 254–55.

112 News.

113 Rosenthal, *New myth, new world*, p. 388.

114 For example, Rees, in Apor et al., *The leader cult in communist dictatorships*, p. 9; and, Orlando Figes & Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: the language and symbols of 1917*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1999, p. 103.

115 '"The Church was full of crying peasants" one witness recalled. "What will become of us?" they constantly repeated — "They have taken the Tsar away from us?"' F. Isupov, *Pered izgnaniem, 1887–1919*, Moscow, 1993, p. 187 quoted in Figes & Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, p. 138.

crossed themselves when his name was mentioned. From the time of Ivan the Terrible, tsars and princes were often depicted in official portraiture as having haloes as they went into battle (both spiritual and physical) on behalf of their subjects.[116] Aside from its sacred connotations, the halo was a symbol of kingship. Klaus-Georg Riegel sees strong similarities between the blend of the sacred and secular found in the person of the tsar, and that to be found in modern political religions: 'The Tsarist hierocracy — a close affiliation of autocratic monarchy and Orthodox Christianity — represented a fusion of secular and sacral power typical of the modern political religions to come.'[117]

Faith in the tsar as the protector of the people was severely shaken by the events of *Krovavoie Voskresen'ie* (Bloody Sunday)[118] in 1905. Unarmed and peaceful workers, led by Orthodox priest Georgii Gapon, had come to the Winter Palace to present a petition to the tsar, singing 'God save the tsar' and carrying icons and portraits of the tsar, in the belief that he would be prepared to listen to their grievances.[119] Although Nicholas II had left the Winter Palace, the petitioners were gunned down by Nicholas' Imperial Guard, belying the notion that this tsar was the ordained protector of the people. As in the past, the myth of the benevolent tsar or 'tsar-deliverer' was easily transferable to the next strong leader who promised to save the country and its people. In 1923, British Ambassador George Buchanan recounted a conversation he had with a Russian soldier, in which the soldier said: 'Yes, we need a republic, but at its head there should be a good Tsar.'[120]

Stalin is famously quoted as having said: 'Don't forget that we are living in Russia, the land of the tsars … the Russian people like it when one person stands at the head of the state', and 'The people need a tsar, i.e. someone to revere and in whose name to live and labour.'[121]

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116 Sergei Bogatyrev, 'Bronze tsars: Ivan the Terrible and Fedor Ivanovich in the décor of early modern guns', *SEER*, 88:1/2, 2010, pp. 48–72, p. 69.

117 Riegel, 'Marxism–Leninism as a political religion', p. 100.

118 22 January/9 January old calendar, 1905.

119 The petitioners were attempting to draw the tsar's attention to poor and unsafe work conditions, low wages, long working days, and the introduction of conscription, in the hope that the tsar would intervene on their behalf.

120 George Buchanan, *My mission to Russia and other diplomatic memoirs*, vol. 2, London, Cassell and Company Ltd, 1923, p. 86.

121 D.L. Brandenberger & A.M. Dubrovsky source these statements as follows: R.A. Medvedev, *K sudu istorii: genezis i posledstviya stalinizma*, New York, 1974, p. 628; 'Dnevnik Marili Anisimovny Svanidze', in 'Iosif Stalin v ob''yatiyakh sem'i: iz lichnogo arkhiva, Sbornik dokumentov', Yu. G. Murin & V.N. Denisov (eds), Moscow, 1993, p. 176. Similar statements are

Evidently Stalin believed that Russia could only be governed by the firm hand of a vanguard leadership, but also that this was the wish of the people as well. In fact, in the years immediately following the October Revolution, Lenin and most of the other Bolshevik leaders frequently reiterated their belief that the country was not ready to be ruled directly by the proletariat, and that power had to be concentrated in the hands of a small, centralised Bolshevik minority if Russia was to survive and overcome the many obstacles it faced — and if indeed the Bolsheviks were to maintain power. According to Lenin, such strong, centralised leadership was legitimated by revolutionary circumstance which arose from class struggle.[122]

It is beyond the scope of this study to debate whether or not, and under what circumstances, Russia may need a 'tsar' at the helm of government. Psychologist Bruce Mazlish, in his exploration of group psychology and the study of history, argues against the notion of a 'national character' that predisposes the inhabitants of a particular country to adopt certain unitary character traits or codes of psychological need, and states that 'national character' is a 'non-existent analytical tool'.[123] In fact, as historian Edward L. Keenan argues, Russia is not historically predisposed to autocratic rule and has demonstrated a preference for oligarchic or collegiate rule with a politically weak nominal autocrat, except in times of rapid socio-economic change and political turbulence.[124] What is significant, though, is that this perception exists, it is often reiterated, and that those in leadership roles during the Soviet era appear to have accepted and promoted the necessity for a strong, authoritarian figure to lead

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reported in A. Antonov-Ovseyenko, *The time of Stalin: portrait of a tyranny*, New York, 1981, p. 223; A. Antonov-Ovseenko, *Portret Tirana*, Moscow, 1995, p. 344; and, Edvard Radzinsky, *Stalin*, Moscow, 1997, p. 356 (although the latter may have lifted his quotation, attributed to Petr Chagin, from an English-language edition of Medvedev's book; e.g. Roy Medvedev, *Let history judge: the origins and consequences of Stalinism*, George Shriver (ed. & trans.), New York, 1989, p. 586 and n. 98 ('"The people need a tsar": the emergence of national Bolshevism as Stalinist ideology, 1931–1941', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 50:5, 1998, pp. 873–92, p. 873).

122 'a revolution differs from a "normal" situation in the state precisely because controversial issues of state life are decided by the direct class and popular struggle … This fundamental fact implies that in time of revolution it is not enough to ascertain "the will of the majority" — you must *prove to be the stronger* at the decisive moment and in the decisive place; you must *win*' (V.I. Lenin, '*Constitutional illusions*', *Rabochy i soldat*, 4 & 5 (22 & 23) Aug. 1917, *Collected works*, vol. 25, Stepan Apresyan & Jim Riordan (trans.), Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1964, pp. 197, 201, 203–04.

123 Mazlish, 'Group psychology', p. 168.

124 Edward L. Keenan, 'Muscovite political folkways', *Russian Review*, 45:2, 1986, pp. 115–81, p. 118.

the country, even to the extent that many endorsed the use of terror against their own people. Propaganda that aimed to elevate and glorify this strong figure found an audience in the Party, in the bureaucracy, and also in the general population. The severity of the measures taken to repress dissent is an indication of how threatening it was perceived to be. Merely eliminating dissenters, however, was not enough to harness the population for the task of building a new state. For this colossal effort, the population had to be actively engaged to participate in the process, and to commit wholeheartedly to the Party's goals.

Succession dilemmas and the manufacture of charisma

As already noted, one of the major reasons that propaganda was needed to create the image of a powerful, infallible leader who could work miracles, was because neither Lenin nor Stalin (nor, in fact, the Bolshevik Party itself) could lay claim to power based on either traditional (i.e. monarchic succession) or rational–legal grounds. Lenin was in power, although without holding an official title as head of state, for only seven years before his death, four of which saw the nation embroiled in civil war. He carried authority due to his intense charismatic relationship with his Party, in the initial phases, and after with the nation as a whole. It could be argued that the manufacture of the full-blown cult of Lenin served the function of legitimating the Bolshevik regime after the death of its charismatic leader, and then of legitimating Stalin as leader. Or, to put it in Weberian terms, in the 1920s the Bolshevik Party was faced with the challenges of a routinisation of charisma and, then, with the problem of succession when Lenin died. This challenge was met initially by transferring the personal charisma of the leader to the impersonal mechanism of the Party through the cult of Lenin, and by focusing on appeals to ideological legitimation. Once Stalin consolidated his personal power, the propaganda mechanism of the Party set about manufacturing a charismatic personality for Stalin that, over the three decades of his rule, gradually saw the transfer of all legitimacy to reside only in his persona. When Stalin died in 1953, the Weberian dilemma of succession once more raised its head, charisma was again transferred to the Party, and Stalin's cult of personality was denounced.

The origins of charismatic legitimation can probably be traced as far back as late tribal societies and the succession battles that occurred in the increasingly complex early agricultural societies. When challenges occurred to hereditary/traditional leadership, legitimacy claims were enhanced by artificial attempts to stage-manage the charismatic process and create what Ronald Glassman calls 'psychic grandeur', using padding, stilts, magic symbols and myths and legends.[125] While the concept of 'manufactured charisma' may initially appear to be both cynical and exploitative on the part of the leadership, the deliberateness and calculation involved in setting up the personality cult does not necessarily belie a sincerity of belief in the ultimate goals of the regime, or in the leader's mission. Graeme Gill suggests that the manufacture of a personality cult around the figure of the leader was not only for the benefit of the general public. In fact, he sees the cult as being a unifying and rallying force for the inner circle and true believers, glorifying their past and promising a bright future in the face of the struggles of the present.[126] In 1930 Voroshilov wrote to Stalin: 'Dear Koba … Mikoyan, Kaganovich, Kuibyshev and I think the best result would be the unification of the leadership of the Sovnarkom and to appoint you to it as you want to take the leadership with all strength.'[127] Anastas Mikoian also wrote: 'Nowadays we need strong leadership from a single leader as it was in Illich [Lenin's] time and the best decision is you to be the candidate for the Chairmanship … Doesn't all of mankind know who's the ruler of our country?'[128]

The personality cult can be viewed primarily as a political tool with a lengthy and well-documented record of success in conferring legitimacy on a leader who lacks traditional or legal–rational authority, or for whom these grounds of legitimation are under challenge. In such circumstances, charismatic legitimation can serve to bolster authority for as long as the charismatic leader is able to deliver on the promises made to his supporters. Charismatic leaders emerge from revolutionary situations by articulating and embodying the revolutionary vision and the ideals of the new society. The charismatic relationship tends to be relatively shortlived because, in the face of obstacles and opposition,

125 See Ronald Glassman, 'Legitimacy and manufactured charisma', *Social Research*, 42:4, 1975, pp. 615–37, pp. 618–19.
126 Graeme Gill, 'Personality cult, political culture and party structure', *Studies in Comparative Communism*, 17:2, 1984, pp. 111–21, p. 119.
127 Voroshilov quoted in Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 62.
128 Mikoian quoted in Montefiore, *Stalin*, p. 62.

the leader is unable to deliver on the revolutionary promises in the long term, the routine and mundane tasks of government overwhelm the revolutionary spirit,[129] and the charismatic leader dies and has no traditional or established means of transferring his charisma to a successor. The manufacture of charisma through the creation of a personality cult that is initially attached to the dead (or dying) leader, but comes to include the successor, provides a means of transferring charisma to either an impersonal party or to a designated successor. If the new leader is to maintain power in the long term, charisma must come to reside in his person and he must be demonstrated to embody the party's vision and ideology and to symbolise collective values. A symbolic identity is created around the new leader, drawing on ritual, myth and ancient archetypes to endow him with a charismatic persona.

Myth

Myth is an essential component of all societies. It explains where a society has come from, provides a notion of collective identity and indicates a collective destination. When a revolution occurs and the old order is overthrown, a radical break with the past is required, and much of the symbolism, ritual and myth associated with the old order is discarded and replaced with new myths that support the values of the new society. This was the essential reasoning behind Lenin's decree 'on the dismantling of monuments erected in honour of the tsars and their servants and on the formulation of projects for monuments of the Russian socialist revolution', of August 1918. Lenin had an understanding of the role of myth in society, and was influenced by his reading of Georges Sorel, for whom myths were mobilising ideas that could spur the workers into action. Mythology did not have to be objectively true, but it did have to be embodied in powerful symbols. Myths were to carry an emotional charge that reached people at an unconscious level and could be grasped only by intuition alone.

129 In his article on Max Weber and Sigmund Freud, Donald McIntosh notes that the transition from rebellious band to responsible administrators and organisers is psychologically very difficult for the revolutionary leadership, and that it is striking how often the task of building the new society is left to the successor. McIntosh cites as examples Jesus and the Apostles Peter and Paul, Caesar and Augustus, Robespierre and Napoleon, Gandhi and Nehru, and Lenin and Stalin ('Weber and Freud: on the nature and sources of authority', *American Sociological Review*, 35:5, 1970, pp. 901–11, p. 906).

For Sorel, myths are not lies, propaganda or ideology in the modern sense of these words; they are not cynically manufactured either. Myths are already present, in a latent form, within the mass itself. They are already anchored in the collective unconscious, and should simplify the world and identify enemies.[130] Although the Bolsheviks may have originally cast new characters in the major roles, and branded their rituals and celebrations with their own symbols and colours, the basic form and narrative content of their myths, and their use of archetypal characters, drew from the universal collective unconscious and thus demonstrated remarkable consistencies with the myths of past societies. By the late 1930s, Stalinist propaganda was even reaching back to the great Russian mythological past to demonstrate a continuity of values and principles. There is a degree of inevitability in this, as it is almost impossible to produce an image without context and which is devoid of any cultural baggage: to do so would make it virtually incomprehensible.

The Bolshevik quest for the new man, the new society, and the new morality are all facets of the yearning for a new myth. Bernice Rosenthal argues that the Bolshevik drive to create a new culture does not in fact derive from their reading of Marx and Engels, who never developed a detailed theory of culture, believing that it would change following changes in the economic base of the superstructure. The quest for the new man had preoccupied Russian radicals since the 1860s[131] and gained impetus for the Bolsheviks from their reading of Nietzsche,[132] Richard Wagner, and their Russian popularisers.

While ideology underpins the dominant conceptions of social reality in a society, it is inherently unsuited to the everyday tasks of communication between leaders and citizens.[133] What was needed by the Bolshevik Party leadership in order to conduct this dialogue and create a new man, a new society and, indeed, a new civilisation, was a metanarrative that incorporated a Soviet mythology to motivate the masses to act in accordance with the ideological tenets of Marxism.

130 See David Gross, 'Myth and symbol in Georges Sorel', in S. Drescher, D. Sabean & A. Sharlin (eds), *Political symbolism in modern Europe: essays in honour of George L. Mosse*, New York, Transaction, 1982, pp. 104–57, pp. 104–05.

131 Rosenthal, *New myth, new world*, p. 9.

132 Nietzsche could still be openly discussed in Russia until 1917. See Rosenthal, *New myth, new world*, p. 3.

133 Gill, *Symbols and legitimacy in Soviet politics*, p. 3.

As Gill points out, all myths throughout the world have three themes in common: 'the existence of an evil conspiracy against the community, the presence of a saviour who can release the community from this threat, and the coming of a golden age.'[134] As will be seen in Chapters Three and Four, Soviet propaganda was dominated by these themes. A large genre of posters, although very few that actually contain an image of Stalin, was devoted to identifying and ridiculing the enemy — first, class enemies, then enemies of the people and the fascist German enemy. Stalin was depicted in propaganda as the only person who could reliably identify these enemies, and as the saviour who delivered victory over fascism to the Soviet people and was to bring peace to the whole world. Much of Soviet propaganda depicted a calm and joyous communist utopia just around the corner.

One of the dominant myths in Soviet society was built around the life of Stalin. The biography of Stalin documented how a cobbler's son from a poor and humble family used the strength of his will, courage and Bolshevik values to rise to leadership of the nation. Although the bones of this story are true, the incidents related in the biography are mythical and formulaic. James von Geldern and Richard Stites see this mythology of opportunity as having a strong base in the working class (upward social mobility for the working class was state policy) and as being widely accepted by the Soviet citizenry: 'The popular audience did not reject the cult of Stalin as something directed against its interests, but accepted it as a myth of success available to anyone. National heroes were symbols of common endeavor, and their successes were shared by all.'[135]

In her study of the cult of Stalin for children, Catriona Kelly examines the representation of Stalin as a hero for children in Soviet fairytales (*skazka*)[136] where his 'magical' qualities consisted not only in his power of self-transformation, but also in his ability to watch over and protect everyone.[137] As will be seen in Chapter Three, Stalin was often depicted in posters as watching over the nation, children

134 Gill, *Symbols and legitimacy in Soviet politics*, p. 4.

135 von Geldern & Stites, *Mass culture in Soviet Russia*, p. xix.

136 In an interesting parallel, 2004 saw the publication in the Soviet Union of a book of *Fairytales about our president*, which uses a series of *lubki* to illustrate the exploits of President Vladimir Putin.

137 Catriona Kelly, 'Riding the magic carpet: children and leader cult in the Stalin era', *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 49:2, 2005, pp. 199–224.

in particular, and the Spassky tower of the Moscow Kremlin often appeared almost as a fairytale castle. Stalin became the subject of odes, eulogies and pseudo-folktales and folk songs, using native traditions to create stories around the Stalin persona. Despite the fact that some of them were illiterate, several folksingers and narrators were elected full members of the Union of Soviet writers, were elected to positions in government and were given awards.[138]

Conclusion

When examining the cult of personality from a historical perspective, beginning with the ancient world and exploring historical developments in Europe up to modern times, it is apparent that the basic features of charismatic leadership, and the cults of personality manufactured around charismatic leaders, show more similarities with each other than differences, regardless of geography or epoch. This is hardly surprising, because charismatic leaders and the conditions that create them have existed across societies through time, and the problems faced by these leaders and their states are remarkably consistent. Despite the fact that the very nature of political propaganda is such that it promotes each of these leaders as uniquely talented and blessed, or at the very least as one of a rare breed, in many respects their public personas are almost interchangeable, with their personality cults sharing several key genres, symbols and literary characteristics.

138 Felix J. Oinas, 'The political uses and themes of folklore in the Soviet Union', *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, 12:2/3, 1975, pp. 157–75, p. 163.

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