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Konstantin Sheiko
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NATIONALIST IMAGININGS OF THE RUSSIAN PAST

Anatolii Fomenko and the Rise of Alternative History
in Post-Communist Russia

With a foreword by Donald Ostrowski

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*To my mother Emily, father Boris, sister Natasha and niece Alexandra
back in Russia*

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Foreword

Alternative or alternate history is a merger of science fiction and historical fiction in that it attempts a speculative reformulation of history, along the lines of 'what if history were different?' These alternative histories often find willing believers among those untrained in critical historical thinking. *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown, for example, never claimed to be more than fiction, yet it had tens of thousands of readers convinced the conspiracy described in it was historical fact. Anatolii Fomenko and other 'new chronology' historians in Russia do pretty much the same thing as Dan Brown did, except (a) they claim to believe in their own speculative fiction (which places them in the category of cranks) and (b) they ratchet up the conspiracy to include all world history and all serious academic scholars.

Konstantin Sheiko's book is a well-written, well-researched discussion of the phenomenon of the 'new chronology' history in Russia since the fall of the USSR. Sheiko focuses on the writings of Anatolii Fomenko, but also discusses other 'pseudo-historians' as 'a problem in history' in order to try to understand what the context for their popularity is. Their books sell in the hundreds of thousands while serious academic historians sell merely in the hundreds. The main argument of the 'new chronology' historians is that history has been falsified to deny Russia and the Russians their proper place in history. By eliminating much of the Middle Ages and, among other things, the Mongol invasion, by claiming that Russia was founded before ancient Greece and Rome, and by placing the writing of the Old Testament after the writing of the New Testament, along with other 'reformulations', Fomenko proposes an ultra-patriotic view of history in which the Russians dominate at every turn. Christopher Columbus, for example, was a Russian agent when he discovered the New World, and so forth.

As context for his analysis, Sheiko presents the most recent serious scholarship on Russian history and contrasts Fomenko's and other 'new chronology' historians' refashioning of it. According to Sheiko, the 'new chronology' historians are able to capitalize both on the Soviet claim that out-

siders falsified Russian history and on the subsequent distrust of the Soviet version of things. In rejecting both the foreign version and the Soviet version, the 'new chronology' historians, thus, are able to find a gullible audience ready to believe in an egregiously contorted reformulation. The astrophysicist Carl Sagan in his book *Broca's Brain* (1979) argued that it was incumbent upon serious scholars to refute the theories of the cranks and charlatans; otherwise, if they ignore those theories, they concede the public forum to them by default.

In this light, Sheiko has done historical scholarship an important service. Sheiko's work on this topic is impressive. He is up to date on the latest scholarship and does well in summarizing the theories of Fomenko and the other 'new chronology' historians in a fair and clear manner, which is not an easy task. He also is able to refute their claims through appeal to evidence, logical argument, and elegant interpretation.

Donald Ostrowski
Cambridge, Mass.

Introduction

Since the fall of Communism in 1991, Russian historians have engaged in a process of rewriting, rediscovering and reinventing Russia's past. They have been joined by an army of popular and amateur historians who write about the past often in the hope of influencing contemporary politics and public opinion. This book concerns a group of writers whose focus is the past and whose work, amateur rather than scholarly, is part of the present contest to establish a new identity for post-Communist Russia.

A central question for post-Communist Russian identity is the relationship between Russia and its imperial heritage. Vera Tolz has pointed out that for Russia, the process of nation building has been complicated by the fact that:

Russia has traditionally been the centre of an empire, and therefore confusion over the 'just borders' of the new state is greater among politicians, intellectuals and even ordinary people than is the case in the non-Russian newly independent states...what is important to note is that the early creation of an empire (well before the process of Russian nation building began), the empire's land-based character and the resulting high level of mutual cultural influences and assimilation between conquerors and conquered to some extent blurred the feeling of difference between the imperial people and other subjects of the empire.¹

Another distinguishing feature of Russian identity, according to Tolz, is that the majority of intellectuals in Russia see the broadly defined 'West', rather than non-Russians of the former Soviet Union, as 'the constituting other' in opposition to which Russia seeks to understand itself. According to the historian Alexander Yanov, Russians have always been divided into those who viewed Russia as part of the European tradition and those who favour a special path or *Sonderweg* for Russia. For many Russian patriots, there was a clash of civilisations, a war between individualistic Romano-German Europe

1 Vera Tolz, *Russia* (London: Arnold, 2001), 70-73.

and the more spiritual and collectivist world of Orthodox Russia.²

Vladimir Shlapentokh has noted the importance of what he describes as the 'greatness syndrome' to the Russian sense of identity. Historically, Russians have compared the status of their state to the greatest power of the day - France in the eighteenth century, Britain in the nineteenth century and the United States in the twentieth century. Shlapentokh noted opinion polls in the mid 1990s that suggested 75% of Russians were nostalgic for the Soviet Union and its superpower status. About the same number looked forward to the reappearance of Russian greatness in the future.³

These three broad themes of imperial heritage, opposition to the West and the search for greatness are of crucial importance for the writers whose work is the subject of this book. These writers are engaged in the process of imagining a new Russia, although they regard this new Russia as the recovery of something ancient and essential. They have become popular at a time when Russia's identity is up for grabs, and when it is by no means clear whether Russia's present rulers will succeed either in building a Western-style nation state or in reestablishing Russia as the powerful international actor it was in centuries past.

Anatolii Fomenko (1945-) is a renowned mathematician who belongs to the academic staff of Moscow State University. Fomenko is a member of Russia's Academy of Sciences, a professor with a doctorate in applied physics and mathematics, head of the Mechanical-Mathematical Department of Moscow State University and author of one hundred and eighty scientific works. He has written twenty-six monographs and textbooks in his specialist field of mathematics. Fomenko was awarded Russia's State Award in 1996 for his scientific achievements.⁴

2 Alexander Yanov, 'Russian nationalism in Western studies: misadventures of a Moribund paradigm,' *Demokratizatsiia* 9:4 (Fall 2001): 552.

3 Vladimir Shlapentokh, 'Is the greatness Syndrome Eroding?' *The Washington Quarterly* 25:1 (January 1, 2002): 132.

4 Anatolii Fomenko and Gleb Nosovskii, *Novaia khronologiia i kontseptsia drevnei Rusi, Anglii, Rima. Fakty, statistika, gipotesy* II volumes (Moscow: Moscow State University press MGU, 1995, 1996); Anatolii Fomenko, *Novaia khronologiia Gretsii. Antichnost' i srednevekov'e* II volumes (Moscow: MGU, 1996); Anatolii Fomenko and Gleb Nosovskii, *Imperiia: Rus', Turtsia, Kitai, Evropa, Egipet. Novaia matematicheskaia khronologiia drevnosti* (Moscow: Faktorial press, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999); Anatolii Fomenko and Gleb Nosovskii, *Rus' i Rim. Pravil'no li my poinimaem istoriiu Evropy i Azii?* II volumes (Moscow: Olimp, AST print house, 1997); Anatolii Fomenko and Gleb Nosovskii, *Novaia khronologiia Rusi* (Moscow: Faktorial press, 1997); Anatolii Fomenko and Gleb Nosovskii, *Matematicheskaia khronologiia bibleiskikh sobytii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1997); Anatolii Fomenko, 'Smysl

Fomenko's interest in astronomy and its application to chronology caused him to undertake what would prove to be a commercially successful journey into popular history writing. He began his historical research in the 1970s but only came to prominence outside of mathematics after the collapse of Communism. Fomenko is the founder and leading light of the 'New Chronology' movement whose efforts to rewrite Russian and world history have generated much amusement but also great controversy inside Russia.

Together with his colleague, Gleb Nosovskii (1958-), whose qualifications include a PhD in physics and mathematics, Fomenko embarked upon a wildly speculative rewriting of Russian history. They have spawned a significant number of like-minded amateur historians, many of them scientists turned pseudo-historians like themselves.⁵ Among their supporters is Gary

russkogo dela v sokhranении Imperii,' *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 21 November 1996; Anatolii Fomenko and Gleb Nosovskii, *Rekonstruktsia vseobshchei istorii* (Moscow: Delovoi Ekpress, 1999); Anatolii Fomenko and Gleb Nosovskii, *Bibleiskaia Rus'* II volumes (Moscow: Faktorial press, 1998, 2000); Anatolii Fomenko and Gleb Nosovskii, *Rus'-Orda na stranitsakh bibleiskikh knig* (Moscow: Anvik, 1998); Anatolii Fomenko and Gleb Nosovskii, *Vvedenie v novuiu khronologiiu, kakoi seichas vek?* (Moscow: Kraft+Lean, 1999); Anatolii Fomenko, *New Methods of Statistical Analysis of Historical Texts. Applications to Chronology* III volumes (New York: Edwin Mellen Press); Anatolii Fomenko and Gleb Nosovskii, *Rekonstruktsia vseobshchei istorii. Issledovania 1999-2000* (Moscow: Delovoi ekspress, 1999); Anatolii Fomenko and Gleb Nosovskii, *Kakoi seichas vek?* (Moscow: Aif-Print, 2002); Anatolii Fomenko, Gleb Nosovskii, *History: Fiction or Science* VII vol. (Paris, London, New York: Delamere, 2003).

- 5 Among the many popular historians who corroborate Fomenko or criticise conventional historical accounts of Russian and world history are Anatolii Abrashkin, *Predki russkikh v drevnem mire* (Moscow: Veche, 2001); Anatolii Abrashkin, *Drevnie Rossy: Mifologicheskie paralleli i puti migratsii* (Nizhnii Novgorod: NNGU print house, 1999); Anatolii Abrashkin, *Chudo-Uydo: Istoriia odnogo perevoplashchenia* (Nizhnii Novgorod: NNGU print house, 1999); Anatolii Abrashkin, *Rus' sredizemnomorskaia i zagadki Biblii* (Moscow: Veche, 2003); Anatolii Abrashkin, *Tainy Troianskoi voiny i sredizemnomorskaia Rus'* (Moscow: Veche, 2006); Anatolii Abrashkin, *Sredizemnomorskaia Rus': velikaia derzhava drevnosti* (Moscow: Veche, 2006); Anatolii Abrashkin, *Skifskaia Rus'. Ot Troi do Kieva* (Moscow: Veche, 2008); Alexander Bushkov, *Rossia kotori ne bylo* (Moscow: 'OLMA-Press', 1997); Alexander Bushkov and Andrey Burovskii, *Rossia kotori ne bylo II, Russkaia Atlantida* (Moscow: 'OLMA-Press', 2001); Alexander Bushkov, *Rossia kotori ne bylo III, mirazhi i prizraki* (Moscow: 'OLMA-press', 2004); Alexander Bushkov, *Rossia kotori ne bylo IV. Blesk i krov' gvardeiskogo stoletia* (Moscow: 'OLMA-press', 2005); Alexander Bushkov, *Zemlia. Planeta prizrakov* (Moscow: 'OLMA-press', 2007); Alexander Bushkov, *Ivan Groznyi. Krovavyi poet* (Moscow: 'OLMA-press', 2007); Alexander Bushkov, *Chingiz-khan. Neizvestnaia Azia* (Moscow: 'OLMA-Press', 2008); Alexander Bushkov, *Rasputin. Vystrely iz proshlogo* (Moscow: 'OLMA-press', 2008); Alexander Bushkov, *Stalin. Krasnyi monarkh* (Moscow: 'OLMA-press', 2008); Alexander Bushkov, *Stalin. Ledianoi tron*

(Moscow: 'OLMA-press', 2008); Andrey Burovskii, *Nesbyvshaiasia Rossiia* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2007); Andrey Burovskii, *Ariiskaia Rus': lozh' i pravda o vysshei rase* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2007); Leonid Bocharov, Nikolai Efimov, Igor Chachukh and Igor Chernyshev, *Zagovor protiv russkoi istorii* (Moscow: ANVIK, 2001); Alexander Guts, *Mnogovariantnaia Istoriiia Rossii* (Moscow: AST, 2000, 'Poligon', 2001); Alexander Guts, 'Mif o vosstanovlenii istoricheskoi pravdy,' *Matematicheskie struktury i modelirovanie* 1 (1998); Alexander Guts, *Podlinnaia Istoriiia Rossii* (Omsk: OMGU, 1999); Alexander Guts, 'Modeli mnogovariantnoi istorii,' *Matematicheskie strukturu i modelirovanie* 4 (1999); Valerii Demin, *Otkuda ty, russkoe plemia?* (Moscow: Veche, 1996); Valerii Demin, *Tainy Russkogo naroda* (Moscow: Veche, 1997); Valerii Demin, *Giperboreia – utro tsivilizatsii* (Moscow: Veche, 1997); Valerii Demin, *Zagadki Russkogo severa* (Moscow: Veche, 1999); Valerii Demin, *Tainy zemli russkoi* (Moscow: Veche, 2000); Valerii Demin, *Giperboreia: istoricheskie korni russkogo naroda* (Moscow: Veche, 2000); Valerii Demin, *Zagadki russkikh letopisei* (Moscow: Veche, 2001); Valerii Demin, *Zvezdnaia sud'ba narodov Rossii* (Moscow: Veche, 2001); Valerii Demin, *Rus' giperboreiskaia* (Moscow: Veche, 2002); Valerii Demin, *Zagadki russkogo mezhdurech'ia* (Moscow: Veche, 2003); Valerii Demin, *Drevnee drevnosti: rossiiskaia prototsivilizatsia* (Moscow: Veche, 2003); Valerii Demin, *V poiskakh kolybeli tsivilizatsii* (Moscow: Veche, 2004); Iurii Petukhov, *Vechnaia Rossiia* (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardia, 1990); Iurii Petukhov, *Dorogami Bogov* (Moscow: Mysl', 1990); Iurii Petukhov, *Kolybel' Zevsa: Istoriiia Russov ot antichnosti do nashikh dnei* (Moscow: Mysl', 1998); Iurii Petukhov, *Gibel' Rossii* (Moscow: Mysl', 1999); Iurii Petukhov, *Istoriiia Russov 40.000 let do nashei ery vol. I* (Moscow: Mysl', 2000); Iurii Petukhov, *Russkaia Khazaria* (Moscow: Mysl', 2001); Iurii Petukhov, *Tainy drevnikh russov* (Moscow: Veche, 2001, 2002, 2003); Iurii Petukhov, *Rusy drevnego Vostoka* (Moscow: Veche, 2003); Viktor Kandyba, *Istoriiia russkogo naroda* (St-Petersburg: Lan', 1996); Viktor Kandyba and Peter Zolin, *Real'naia istoriiia Rossii* (St-Petersburg: Lan', 1997); Viktor Kandyba and Peter Zolin, *Istoriiia i ideologia ruskkogo naroda* II volumes (St-Petersburg: Lan', 1997); Viktor Kandyba, *Zaprechshennaia Istoriiia* (St-Petersburg: Lan', 1998); Iaroslav Kesler, *Russkaia tsivilizatsia* (Moscow: Eko-press, 2000, 2002); Iaroslav Kesler and Igor Davidenko, *Kniga tsivilazatsii* (Moscow: Eko-press, 2001); Iaroslav Kesler, *Azbuka i Russko-Evropeiskii slovar'* (Moscow: Kraft+, 2001); Iaroslav Kesler and Dmitrii Kaliuzhnyi, *Zabytaia Istoriiia Moskovii. Ot stroitel'stva Moskvyy do raskola* (Moscow: Veche, 2003); Iaroslav Kesler and Dmitrii Kaliuzhnyi, *Zabytaia Istoriiia Rossiiskoi imperii* (Moscow: Veche, 2004); Igor Davidenko, *Lozhnye maiaki istorii* (Moscow: Eko-press, 2002); Vladislav Poliakovskii, *Tataro-Mongoly, Evrazia, Mnogovariantnost'* (Kaluga: GUP Oblizdat, 2002); Anatolii Storozhev and Vladimir Storozhev, *Rossiia vo vremeni*, book I, (Moscow: Veche, 1997); Sergey Valianskii and Dmitrii Kaliuzhnyi, *Put' na vostok ili bez vesti propavshie vo vremeni* (Moscow: Kraft+Lean, 1997); Sergey Valianskii and Dmitrii Kaliuzhnyi, *Drugaia Istoriiia nauki* (Moscow: Veche, 2002); Sergey Valianskii and Dmitrii Kaliuzhnyi, *Drugaia Istoriiia Rusi* (Moscow: Veche, 2002); Dmitrii Kaliuzhnyi and Alexander Zhabinskii, *Drugaia Istoriiia vojn* (Moscow: Veche, 2003); Sergey Valianskii, *Uslovia Vyzhivania Rossii* (Moscow: Kraft+, 2005); Murad Adzhi, *My – iz roda Polovetskogo* (Rybinsk: 1992); Murad Adzhi, *Polyn' polovetskogo polia* (Moscow: Pik-Kontekst, 1994); Murad Adzhi, *Taina Sviatogo Georgia, ili podarennoe Tengri* (Moscow: 1997); Murad Adzhi, *Evropa, Turki, velikaia step'* (Moscow: Mysl', 1998); Murad Adzhi, *Kipchaki* (Moscow: Novosti, 1999); Murad Adzhi, *Tiurki i mir: sokrovennaia Istoriiia* (Moscow: AST, 2004); Murad Adzhi, *Aziatskaia Evropa* (Moscow: AST, 2006); Murad Adzhi,

Kasparov, one of Russia's most celebrated chess grand masters.⁶ Kasparov's boast that 'I can spread any historian against the wall in a debate about Russian history' was typical of the pugnacious confidence of Fomenko's acolytes.⁷ Alexander Zinoviev, one of Russia's best-known writers, has written a glowing introduction to one of Fomenko's latest publications.⁸

Fomenko's original claim was that conventional chronology was bedevilled with errors and deliberate falsifications. Conventional dating amounted to little more than the ill-informed guesses of early modern scholars like Scaliger, the famous Dutch scholar and astronomer, who, Fomenko alleged, added thousands of years to the story of civilisation and filled in the gaps with the mythology that we know today as ancient history.⁹ For Fomenko, recorded history was not as old as previously thought, ancient history was a duplicate of medieval history, Greeks and Romans deserved far less attention than was usually accorded them, and the Bible's Old Testament was written after the New Testament.

The New Chronology project is far from modest. Fomenko's crowning achievement runs to seven volumes. It is based on research undertaken over thirty years. It turns out, according to Fomenko, that many historical figures are duplicates and triplicates, that is, copies of the one historical personage known in different contexts and eras by different names. Roman history is mostly the history of the Holy Roman Empire, which turns out to be the story

Dykhanie Armagedonna (Moscow: AST, 2006); Vladimir Shcherbakov, *Gde zhili geroi eddicheskikh mifov* (Moscow: 1989); Vladimir Shcherbakov, *Gde iskat' Atlantidu* (Moscow: 1990); Vladimir Shcherbakov, *Asgard – gorod Bogov* (Moscow: 1991); Valerii Khamtsiev and Alexander Balaev, *David Soslan, Friedrich Barbarossa, Alania ot Palestiny to Britanii* (Vladikavkaz: IR, 1992).

6 Davidenko and Kesler, *Kniga tsivilizatsii*, see Kasparov's foreword. Fomenko's endorsement of Kasparov's input is in the foreword to Fomenko, Nosovskii, *Novaia khronologiya i kontseptsia drevnei Rusi, Anglii, Rima. Fakty, statistika, gipotesy*.

7 For Kasparov's endorsement, see Gary Kasparov, 'Chernye dyry istorii,' *Ogonek* 1, 2, 3 (January 1999).

8 See 'Introduction' to Fomenko *History: Fiction or Science* (Paris, London, New York: Delamere Publishing, 2003).

9 Fomenko, Nosovskii, *Bibleiskaia Rus'*, I, 21-24; for mathematical-statistical critique of Skaliger/Petavius see also Anatolii Fomenko, *Metody statisticheskogo analiza narrativnykh tekstov i prilozhenie k khronologii* (Moscow: MGU, 1990, 1996); Anatolii Fomenko, *Globalnaia khronologiya* (Moscow: MGU, 1993); Anatolii Fomenko and Gleb Nosovskii, *Geometrical and statistical methods of analysis of star configurations. Dating of Ptolemy's Almagest* (USA: CRC-Press, 1993); Anatolii Fomenko, *Empirical-statistical analysis of narrative material and its application to historical dating* II volumes (the Netherlands: Kluwer Academic publications, 1994); Fomenko and Nosovskii, *Kakoi seitchas vek?*, 16-33.

of Russia projected westwards and backwards in time. Jesus Christ was also known to history as Pope Gregory the Seventh and lived in Rome in the eleventh century. Only in the seventeenth century did the dating of conventional history and Fomenko's dates achieve unison.

Fomenko's new version of Biblical history, not surprisingly, drew fire from the Russian Orthodox Church. Having been labelled an anti-Christ in the early 1990s Fomenko soon became a celebrity academic, a status that eluded him as a mathematician. Books, television programs and the Internet proclaimed the birth of a new science. Professional historians scoffed, but instead of retreating to his scientific specializations, Fomenko broadened his attack on conventional history and in the process, generated book sales, a dedicated brotherhood of imitators and growing notoriety. Critics who have maintained their sense of humour have labelled Fomenko as 'the terminator' because so many accepted periods, events and personalities are expunged from his version of the past.

Fomenko trawled through the history of Eurasia, Byzantium, and Rome to show that historians all around the world appropriated the achievements of Russians to boost the prestige of their own national history. Arguably, Fomenko's greatest achievement is the invention of a Slav-Turk empire that allegedly dominated the first half of world history, that is, until the seventeenth century. This 'Russian Horde' as Fomenko named it, was based in the area that we normally associate with the Golden Horde founded by the Mongol khans in the thirteenth century.¹⁰

Fomenko's vision is an inspiring one for those who measure Russia's greatness by the amount of space it occupies on a map. He offers an account of the Russian state as if it were the history of all of Eurasia. Fomenko's writing is inspired, in part, by the work of the Eurasianists of the early twentieth century who first argued that Russia was neither European nor Asian but a distinctive society. The academic leader of this group, Nikolai Trubetskoi, argued that Asia was the natural home of Russia in much the same way that Europe was a traditional enemy.¹¹

For most Eurasianists, the Mongols were misunderstood and undervalued. Lev Gumilëv, who has done more than any other Russian writer to popularize Russia's Asian identity, argued that the West deliberately

10 Technically, Golden Horde is the latter-day name applied by Russia to the Qipchaq Khanate.

11 Nikolai Trubetskoi, *The Legacy of Chengiz Khan and other Essays on Russia's identity* (Michiglan Slavic Publications, 1991), 161-67.

engineered a 'black legend' to demonise the Mongols as savage barbarians. Ironically, Fomenko's legend is blacker still because he writes the Mongols out of the history of Russia altogether.¹²

Fomenko's claim, often repeated in the works of popular writers, is that the Mongols, or Tatars as the Russians called them, did not come from far off Central Asia but had always lived within the lands of European Russia along the Volga River and adjacent steppes. Genghis Khan had European features, spoke Slav and Turkic languages and never invaded Russia. While Gumilëv described a symbiosis of Russia and the steppe peoples, Fomenko's goal is to achieve what his thirteenth-century ancestors could not, the extermination of the Mongols from the historical record. According to Fomenko, the myth of the Mongol invasion was an invention of Church chroniclers and the Romanov dynasty, designed to glorify their own contributions to Russian history. Strictly speaking, these are not original claims because, as we shall see, there are earlier writers who have not accepted that Russia lived under Mongol occupation. Fomenko has made these claims popular among a contemporary Russian audience and added his own interpretation to the story of key moments in Russian history.

Conventional historians were at first unsure whether to regard Fomenko and his entourage as post-modern clowns or dangerous ethno-nationalists. For his critics in Russia, Fomenko is both an embarrassment and a potent symbol of the depths to which the Russian academy and society generally have sunk amid the economic disasters and political and military humiliations heaped upon Russia since the fall of Communism. But the critics do admit that Fomenko's writings are popular, especially in comparison to the works of conventional historians whose output often can find no commercial outlet at all. Fomenko's publisher boasts that three hundred thousand copies of Fomenko's works have been sold in an era when ten thousand is considered an excellent print run for popular history.¹³ One of Fomenko's critics noted

12 See his Lev Gumilëv, *Drevniaia Rus' i Velikaia step'* (Moscow: Mysl', 1998).

13 This is the claim made in the publicity for the English translation of Fomenko, *History: Fiction or Science*, (Paris, London, NY: Delamere Publishing, 2003); In the 1990s in Russia, the printing of ten thousand copies was regarded as a sign of a book's popularity. See Viktor Shnirelman, *Who gets the Past? Competition for Ancestors among Non-Russian intellectuals in Russia* (John Hopkins University, 1996), 49. Print runs for other alternative writers are impressive enough in a country where books are a luxury for most people: Viktor Kandyba and Peter Zolin *Istoriia i Ideologia Russkogo naroda* was printed out in 10,000 copies; Murad Adzhi *My roda polovetskogo* and his other books were printed out in 10,000 copies; Alexander

that having made a tour of the Moscow's bookshops one would notice that the best shelves are occupied by the 'alternative' writers, while the serious works of past and present historians evade the eyes of the customer.¹⁴

Academic symposiums have been held at Moscow University to discuss and dissect the new scourge of 'Fomenkoism'. Internet sites proclaim Fomenko's view of world history in a variety of languages while popular radio stations have dedicated discussions to these 'modern' historians. A glossy, illustrated English-language volume has recently appeared to introduce a new world of readers to Fomenko.¹⁵

Conventional historians, having once ignored Fomenko, are now responding to the point where the most recent exposition of the 'anti-history' of Fomenko ran to three large volumes and more than thirty articles.¹⁶ It

Bushkov's *Rossiiia kotoroi ne bylo*, vol. I, 75,000 copies, vol. II – additional print of 7,000 copies; Leonid Bocharov, Nikolai Efimov, Igor Chachukh, Igor Chernyshev, *Zagovor protiv russkoi istorii*, 15,000 copies; Anatolii Abrashkin, *Predki russkikh s drevnem mire*, 7,000 copies. Alternative titles seem to compete well with conventional history books as the printed numbers of copies demonstrate: A. Sakharov, *Istoriia Rossii do 18 veka* II volumes (Moscow: AST, 2003), 10,000 copies; A. Sakharov, *Istoriia Rossii 17-18 veka* (Moscow: Rosman, 2003), 10,000 copies; Vadim Kozhinov, *Prorok v svoem otechestve. Russia 1803-1822* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2002), 5,100 copies; Boris Rybakov, *Rozhdenie Rusi (9-13th centuries)* (Moscow: Aif-Print, 2003), 5,000 copies; Dmitrii Ilovaisky, *Novaia dinastiia* II volumes (Moscow: AST, 2003), 5,000 copies; Dmitrii Ilovaisky, *Nachalo Rusi* (Moscow: AST, 2002), 5,000 copies; Dmitrii Ilovaisky, *Tsarskaia Rus* II volumes (Moscow, AST, 2002), 5,000 copies; Dmitrii Ilovaisky, *Sobirateli Rusi* (Moscow: AST, 2001), 5,000 copies; Dmitrii Ilovaisky, *Stanovlenie Rusi* (Moscow: AST, 2002), 5,000 copies; Sergei Oldenburg, *Samoderzhavnoe pravlenie 1894-1904* (Moscow: 2001), 5,000 copies; B. Soloviev, *Russkoe dvorianstvo*, (Moscow: Poligon, 2001), 5,000 copies; I. Popov, *Rossiiia i Kitai: 300 let na grani voiny* (Moscow: Ast, Astrel', Ermak, 2001, 2004), 5,000 copies; Ruslan Skrynnikov, *Vasilii Shuisky* (Moscow: AST, 2001), 5,000 copies; Ruslan Skrynnikov, *Tri Lzhedmitriia* (Moscow: AST, 2001), 5,000 copies; Ruslan Skrynnikov, *Ivan Groznyi* II volumes (Moscow: AST, 2001), 5,100 copies; series of Lev Gumilëv, *Ot Rusi k Rossii*, 3 parts, (Moscow: 2000), 5,000 copies, additional print 17,000 copies; *Otkrytie Khazarii*, 5,000 copies; *Chtob svecha ne pogasla*, 5,000 copies; *Chernaia legenda*, additional print 15,000 copies; *Tysiacheletie vokrug Kaspii* II volumes (Moscow: AST, 2002), 5,000 copies.

14 See Alexei Laushkin, *Lozh' novoi khronologii. Kak voiet s khristianstvom A.T. Fomenko i ego edinomyshlenniki* (Moscow: Palomnik, 2002).

15 Fomenko, *History: Fiction or Science*.

16 See Igor Nastenko et al., eds., *Istoriia i antiistoriia: Kritika 'novoii khronologii' akademika A. Fomenko* (Moscow: Yazyki russkoi kultury, 2000); Igor Nastenko et al., eds., *Antifomenkovskaia mozaika* 5 books (Moscow: Russkaia panorama, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003); Dmitrii Volodikhin and Dmitrii Oleinikov in collaboration with Olga Eliseeva, *Istoriia Rossii v melkii goroshek* (Moscow: ManufASTura-Edinstvo, 1998); Laushkin, *Lozh' novoi khronologii; Astronomiia protiv 'Novoi Khronologii'* (Moscow: 2001); *Russkaia Istoriia protiv 'Novoi Khronologii'* (Moscow: 2001);

would be fair to say that the best way for many historians in Russia today to reach a popular audience is to write a response to Fomenko. In his own way, Fomenko has come to represent a significant part of what R.W. Davies described as the 'mental revolution' that has taken place within the former Soviet intelligentsia after the collapse of Communism.¹⁷

A book about a wildly speculative pseudo-historian who is still obscure in the West needs some further justification at this point. Certainly, the justification cannot be that Fomenko has contributed something important or new for historians to consider about history. Nor can much credit be taken for identifying the obvious mistakes, distortions and falsehoods that litter 'alternative' or pseudo history. What is interesting is that, while Fomenko seems to be a man of straw, his reconstruction of Russian history thrives despite and almost certainly because of the condemnation of his conventional colleagues.

Fomenko is an example of apocalyptic writing in a troubled land. But, this book will argue, Fomenko has roots in more mainstream thinking and his version of Russian history may well have resonances in the continuing debate about Russian identity. Fomenko is telling an old story about Russia in a slightly new way at a time when Russia is struggling to make the transition from empire to nation-state. He is the inspiration behind an underground war waged by self-styled 'modern' historians whose task is to recover – or steal, depending upon the reader's point of view – a usable past for the post-Communist world.

Fomenko is a case study in Orientalism. Edward Said pointed out that the production of academic knowledge and political power grew together, and that scholars often acted as the willing or naïve instruments of power and subordination. Historians, like explorers or missionaries, have, whether they are conscious of it or not, promoted the colonial enterprise by creating an image of the 'other' preparatory with or simultaneous to its conquest.¹⁸ This may be literally true in the case of Fomenko. For his critics, Fomenko's ideas are providing fuel for those who would reconstitute a Russian Empire. It is not just modern-day Mongols who are deprived of part of their heritage. In

Sbornik Russkogo istoricheskogo obshchestva 3:151 (Moscow: 2000); also see Sergey Fatiushkin's impressive collection of web materials critical of Fomenko, Bushkov and Co: <http://fatus.chat.ru/foma.htm> (as of November 17, 2008).

17 See Robert William Davies, *Soviet history in the Yeltsin era* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 49-75.

18 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1995).

Fomenko's history, Ukraine and Belarus too have no identity outside of their connection to Russia. Pseudo-historians are unrepentant, noting that the Mongolian and Ukrainian peoples are sadly mistaken in the delusion that they were ever anything other than elements of the Russian Horde.

Fomenko sees himself as engaged in a war of ideas where ethno-nationalism is the tactic of his enemies. If Russia is to survive, conventional history has to be overturned and the truth allowed to surface. If, on occasions, his speculations are wide of the mark, this is only to be expected in an age when bold hypotheses are needed as the dark veil of historical ignorance is finally raised to reveal the lingering traces of the world's greatest empire.

Vladimir Tismaneanu has recently identified several threats to the emerging democracies of the post-Communist world. They include Leninist legacies, salvationist popular sentiments, the rhetoric of reactionary nostalgia, the fluidity of political formations, the crisis of values, authority, and accountability, and the tensions between individualistic and communitarian values.¹⁹ Most of these trends and tensions are clearly visible in the writing of Fomenko and the emerging Russian pseudo-history he represents.

Fomenko himself may prove to be just a footnote in the post-Communist path of the decaying Soviet intelligentsia. Soviet Russia was famous for the training *en masse* of scientists, its public libraries and book culture, and its alleged commitment to rid scholarship of religion and other illusory ideologies. It is ironic therefore that Fomenko, a leading Soviet scientist and erudite amateur in the social sciences, should attempt to impart to the next generation a model of history that seems to transgress every rule of science. On the other hand, Fomenko's writing leans heavily upon a pattern of writing history that, as we shall see, emerged from the 'scientific history' of the Stalinist era. On the surface, Fomenko seems to represent a break with the past. In fact, his writing represents a convergence of different elements that crisscross the story of Russia's search for identity over the last three centuries.

To the West, Russia remains the riddle, puzzle and enigma described by Winston Churchill. Tim McDaniel has emphasized the importance to Russian self-identity of the search for Russian uniqueness.²⁰ Many Western

19 Vladimir Tismaneanu, 'Discomforts of victory: democracy, liberal values and nationalism in post-communist Europe,' *West European Politics* 25:2 (April 2002), 81-243.

20 Tim McDaniel, *The Agony of the Russian Idea* (Princeton: Princeton University press, 1996), 22-54.

commentators in the 1990s feared that Russia's history left it unprepared for life as a liberal nation-state. They predicted that Russia would follow the example of the Weimar republic, the depressing path travelled by Germany in the 1920s and 30s from infant democracy to an aggressive, nationalistic and racist dictatorship under the leadership of Adolf Hitler.²¹ One of the more enduring debates about Russia since the fall of Communism was whether the darker predictions of the rise of National Socialism or national Bolshevism in Russia might plunge Europe and the world into new crises.

Weimar has been described as 'democracy without the democrats' and the same formula seemed to apply equally well to post-Communist Russia. According to a former member of Boris Yeltsin's post-Communist government, during the 1990s 'the very word 'democrat' became a swearword'.²² Richard Pipes has argued that aggressive nationalism is the default state of Russian nationalism and the danger of a new wave of militarism and aggressive expansionism is ever present.²³ Many Russians, on the other hand, see themselves as an endangered species. The Moscow philosopher, Vadim Mezhuev, has described Russia as sinking slowly into non-existence.²⁴

It may turn out that these fears are overstated. Sceptics point out that while new Russian revolutions are often predicted, Russia itself seemed relatively stable in the first decade of the twenty-first century, with a new and prosperous elite.²⁵ Extremist groups did not succeed in overturning the post 1991 settlement in the decade after the fall of Communism. On the other hand, poverty has remained a persistent problem, ethnic tensions are obvious throughout the Russian Federation, part of the former Soviet bureaucratic, scientific and military elite has been displaced and alienated, and Russia's post-Communist political system is often described as at best an illiberal democracy.²⁶ Russia's economic growth has not translated into votes for

21 See, for example, Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Refrained. Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), and Judith Devlin, *Slavophiles and Commissars* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 204.

22 McDaniel, *The Agony of the Russian Idea*, 183.

23 Richard Pipes, 'Introduction' in Heyward Isham (ed), *Remaking Russia: Voices from Within* (Armonk: Sharpe, 1995), 5.

24 Quoted in Alexander Yanov, 'Russian nationalism in Western studies: misadventures of a Moribund paradigm,' *Demokratizatsiya* 9:4 (Fall 2001): 556.

25 For positive view of democratic progress in post-Communist Russia, see Leon Aron, 'Russia's revolution,' *Commentary* 114:4 (November 2002): 22-30.

26 For a negative view of democratic progress in post-Communist Russia, see Sarah

liberal political parties. Since 1991, the trend in voting patterns in Russia has moved away from pro-Western reformers, usually described as the political 'right' by Russian commentators. In Duma elections, politicians described as nationalists, conservatives, and so-called 'state-builders', dominate and they seem to have found a leader in the Vladimir Putin and his close ally and successor as Russian president, Dmitrii Medvedev. The mayor of Moscow, Iurii Luzhkov, noted that Russia has become a 'strange bird', lacking its right wing. Yegor Gaidar, the liberal Prime Minister in the first Yeltsin government expressed the view after the disastrous failure of liberals in parliamentary elections in 2004 that his greatest fear was 'a radical nationalistic wave with consequences difficult to predict'.²⁷

Astrid Tuminez has made the point that radical nationalism was not a significant force in Russian elections in the 1990s even though the drift of politics was towards more statist and anti-liberal political parties. For her, nationalism comes in waves, showing that 'brief and limited power of aggressive variants of nationalism' have significant impacts at certain points in Russia's history and can occur after periods of calm.²⁸ Such an observation is compatible with an argument that bursts of nationalist energy are possible in Russia in the years to come.

These developments represent a justification for this book. The pro-Western mood of the late Communist period has given way to a more traditional Russian scepticism towards the outside world. Fomenko's history has become a kind of folk wisdom shunned in the academy but inspiring conversations about history at the popular level. This is because it appeals to those, like Fomenko himself, who managed, associated with or fantasized about a real empire, the Soviet Union, or its imperial predecessor. Russia has found the nationalism of Western Europe difficult to replicate and a growing chorus of voices in Russian politics is sceptical of Western political models in general. It is important to understand how the greatness syndrome manifests itself at a popular level and is transmitted from generation to generation. Few academics in present-day Russia have been more successful than Fomenko in repackaging the patriotic elements of Soviet ideology for a post-Communist

Mendelson, 'Russians' Rights Imperiled. Has Anybody Noticed?' *International Security* 26:4 (2002): 39-69.

27 Quoted in 'Former PM decries Russian nationalism,' *United Press International* (January 28, 2004): 1.

28 Astrid Tuminez, *Russian Nationalism since 1956. Ideology and the Making of Foreign Policy* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 16.

audience.

Fomenko feigns political impartiality, claiming that his research ‘pursues purely scientific purposes and does not aim at any political, religious or societal goals’²⁹. He evokes the image of an elder statesman who must struggle to restrain the young firebrands who are in agreement with him or inspired by his ideas. Fomenko makes no secret of the fact that there is an obvious enemy for Russia, the West. Here Fomenko repeats the complaints of eighteenth century Russian patriots, nineteenth century Slavophiles and Stalinist ideologists in the twentieth century. Fomenko’s novelty lies in the way that he has added the empire of the Mongols to the geopolitical ambitions of the tsars and the international brotherhood of the Soviet Union to write a popular post-Soviet vindication of empire.

Understandably, most academics take a patronizing tone when dealing with the fantastic claims made by nationalists. Hobsbawm has described nationalist historians as the intellectual equivalent of poppy-growers supplying a gullible public with dangerous drugs.³⁰ Russians searching for imaginary parents or glorifying their past is nothing new. In her study of the rituals of socialist realism, Katerina Clark has noted that one of the favourite plots of Soviet novels of the 1930s was that of orphans in search of parents. The message was that ‘the child without a father is...a child without an identity’.³¹ The historian, Yuri Slezkine, who grew up in Russia, has recalled:

Children often fantasize about discovering an enviable set of ‘real parents’; nations can do something about it. One popular strategy is simply to lay claim to more prestigious progenitors (Noah's sons and Herodotus's distant tribes, e.g., have proven their usefulness on numerous occasions); another is to boost the status of existing ones (my own Russian ancestors, I learned in grade (sic) school, had invented the radio, airplane, steam locomotive, and light bulb, while also defending their neighbours from barbarian invasions).³²

29 Nosovskii, Fomenko, *Rus-Orda na stranitsakh bibleyskikh knig*, 9.

30 Eric Hobsbawm, Introduction in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 13.

31 Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 135.

32 Yuri Slezkine, ‘Who Gets the Past: Competition for Ancestors Among Non-Russian Intellectuals in Russia (book review),’ *The Journal of Modern History* 70: 3 (September 1998): 754.

Nonetheless, the phenomenon of writers and readers throughout the former Soviet Union accepting these claims is a real one, in need of close investigation. It might be thought that this 'competition for ancestors', as Vladimir Shnirelman has dubbed it, would have exhausted the competing national groups of the former Soviet Union. In fact, judging by the sheer volume of publications, it seems to have generated even more interest not only just among Russian but also among all the former nations of the Tsarist and Soviet states.³³

While their ideas about history are often simplistic or propagandistic, writers of pseudo-history can play a part in future developments. Liah Greenfeld has noted the distinctive role that Russian intellectuals play. While the 'spirit' of Russia is usually thought to reside in its people or *narod*, this spirit, 'paradoxically, was revealed through the medium of the educated elite, who, apparently, had the ability to divine it'.³⁴ Yitzhak Brudny views the key ingredient in the rise of nationalism as the manipulation of nationalist sentiment by elites.³⁵ To achieve this goal, however, there needs to be a popular history that can tell the Russians who they are. Valerii Tishkov's survey of ethno-nationalism in the former Soviet Union also noted the important role of political and intellectual elites in acting as a catalyst for extreme nationalism.³⁶ The historian, Anatolii Khazanov, has noted that a 'preoccupation with ethnic rather than civic national identity' has affected all former Communist countries, including the successor states of the former Soviet Union.³⁷ Commentators on nationalism often view ethno-nationalism as a sign that intellectuals are setting the agenda. If this is true, then it is important that we discover how the story of ethno-nationalism is told and how it has evolved.

On the other hand, it would be wishful thinking to suggest that Fomenkoism is no more than an elite construction. Fomenko's version of history is popular among a reading public disillusioned with Communism and

33 Victor A. Shnirelman, *Who Gets the Past? Competition for Ancestors among Non-Russian Intellectuals in Russia* (Washington: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996), 1-7.

34 Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Mass, 1992), 261.

35 Yitzhak Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian nationalism and the Soviet state, 1953-1991* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Mass, 1998), 1-4.

36 Valerii Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and after the Soviet Union. The Mind Aflame* (London: Sage, 1997), XIV.

37 Anatolii M. Khazanov, 'Ethnic nationalism in the Russian Federation,' *Daedalus* 126:3 (Summer 1997): 121.

the broken promises of consumer capitalism. It is deliberately aimed at keeping alive an imperial consciousness and secular messianism in Russia. Thus, Fomenko's history has a practical application in modern-day Russia and confirms that an imperialist discourse is alive and well, making more difficult Russia's evolution into a nation state.

This book lays no claim to testing definitively the truth or falsehood of the ideas put forward by Fomenko and his supporters. The claims range from the barely plausible to the ludicrous. The question I have set myself is not the accuracy of the claims made but why such seemingly fantastic histories have emerged with such vitality in post-Communist Russia. To me, the interesting question is why certain fantasies about history take upon a life of their own and others do not. Only part of the answer to this question relates to Fomenko and his motives. The real answer lies in explaining what it is about Fomenko that connects to a post-Soviet audience. To achieve that goal, it is necessary to understand what it is that Fomenko and his readers believe to be wrong with the conventional account of Russia's history.

I am interested in exploring Fomenko as a case study of the pseudo-history that has proliferated everywhere inside the former Soviet Union in the decade after the collapse of Communism. Its popularity suggests that there clearly is a role for those who claim to write history freed from its Romanov and Communist straightjackets. In the present political and ideological void in Russia, Fomenko's alternative history matters more than it might in a more stable country.

I have concluded that seven factors are especially important in explaining the success of Fomenko. In the first place, Fomenko taps into existing Russian self-identity, specifically the belief in the positive qualities of empire and the special mission of Russia. Secondly, Fomenko addresses the key issue of Russia's origins, important because Russians tend to believe that the past holds answers to the future. Thirdly, he has capitalized upon new knowledge about Russia's close relationship to Asia, long denied by Church chroniclers, Romanov propagandists and Communist functionaries. Fourthly, he addresses the present geo-political reality of Russia, which must deal with its relative weakness in relation to the West and its new Asian location. Fifthly, it inspires an audience among the dispossessed, especially the vast reading public that once formed the Soviet intelligentsia. Sixthly, he has borrowed heavily from previous attempts to establish a Russian identity, ranging from Slavophilism to Eurasianism. Seventh, Fomenko is reasonably

ingenious in offering seemingly plausible answers to puzzling and hidden aspects of Russia's conventional history. Fomenko's ideas are popular not because of what he claims is his main concern, that is, rewriting world chronology, but because he finds in history a simple answer to the question of who the Russians are.

The writers under consideration here have a reasonably conservative view of the periods of Russian history and the turning points that shaped Russia's trajectory. There were three crucial moments – the foundation of a Russian state (Kiev Rus), barbarian invasion (the Mongols) and the Time of Troubles that brought the Romanovs to power. As the so-called State School historians of the nineteenth century told it, this was an inspiring tale of paradise (Kiev Rus), paradise lost (the Mongols and Time of Troubles) and redemption (the Romanovs). For Fomenko, this history is as much a mythology as the chronology and religion that underpinned it. Paradise was lost when the Romanovs came to power and only the enduring spirit of Russia has kept alive the flame of former greatness in the modern era.

In Chapter One, I examine the literature dealing with Russian nationalism to elucidate the recurring themes of Russian identity. The consensus in this literature is that Russians have mostly viewed themselves as an imperial nation, that is, that the Russian Empire and Soviet Union was in some sense the Russian nation-state. Russians do not view the concept of empire with the pejorative connotations that this word has in the west.

In Chapter Two, I introduce Fomenko's work and place him in the context of the proliferation of pseudo-history in the former Soviet Union. It is pointed out that pseudo-history is not a strictly Russian phenomenon but that the form that pseudo-history has taken in Russia reflects anxieties about Russian identity.

Chapter Three discusses the first of Russia's turning points. This is the Normanist controversy, an enduring obsession of Russian historiography. Slavophiles and Soviet historians deemed Normanism, that is, the notion that Vikings founded Russia's first state, as deeply insulting and historically inaccurate. Starting with Mikhail Lomonosov in the eighteenth century and continuing to this day, there is an anti-Normanist counter-argument, mostly dismissed in the West, which was shaped into its present form during the Stalin era. Anti-Normanism provides a model that the alternative writers can follow in their efforts to overturn what they regard as the equally implausible legend of Russia's defeat at the hands of invading Mongols in the thirteenth