V.V. Pokhlëbkin and the search for culinary roots in late soviet Russia

V.V. Pohlëbkin et la quête de racines culinaires en Russie à la fin de l'ère soviétique

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/monderusse/7930>

DOI: 10.4000/monderusse.7930

ISSN: 1777-5388

Publisher

Éditions de l'EHESS

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 January 2013

Number of pages: 165-186

ISBN: 9782713224386

ISSN: 1252-6576

Electronic reference

Adrianne K. Jacobs, "V.V. Pokhlëbkin and the search for culinary roots in late soviet Russia", *Cahiers du monde russe* [Online], 54/1-2 | 2013, Online since 01 January 2016, connection on 04 September 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/monderusse/7930> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/monderusse.7930>

ADRIANNE K. JACOBS

V.V. POKHLĚBKIN AND THE SEARCH FOR CULINARY ROOTS IN LATE SOVIET RUSSIA

In the late 1960s, when Vil'iam Vasil'evich Pokhlēbkin first began writing on food and drink in the USSR, many of his readers believed that his peculiar name—closely related to *pokhlēbka*, a variety of Russian soup—masked a group of researchers.¹ How could one person know so much about cuisine, culture, and history?² In reality, Pokhlēbkin, a historian of international relations, turned to food writing after being ejected from the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences in 1959 due to a public disagreement with the institute's director.³ In the wake of this falling out, Pokhlēbkin relocated from Moscow to Podol'sk where he embraced a life-long passion for cuisine and built a new career as a journalist and independent researcher.⁴ During the 1970s, Pokhlēbkin gained popularity among a

All translations from Russian are the author's own unless otherwise indicated. The author would like to thank Donald J. Raleigh, Edward Geist, Emily Baran, Audra Yoder, Alison K. Smith, Ronald F. Feldstein, A.I. Jacobs, Isabelle Oyahon, Marc Elie, and the two anonymous reviewers for their invaluable comments on this project.

1. On the roots of Pokhlēbkin's name, see Ronald F. Feldstein, "An Introduction to William Pokhlēbkin and his Contributions to Russian Culture," *Glossos* 11 (Fall 2011), http://slaviccenters.duke.edu/uploads/media_items/issue-11-feldstein.original.pdf.

2. Elena Mushkina, *Taina kurlandskogo piroga* [The Secret of the Courland Pie] (M.: Severnyi palomnik, 2008), 300.

3. Iurii Poliakov, "Liudi nashei nauki. Mysli i suzheniia istorika [The People of Our Scholarship. A Historian's Thoughts and Judgements]," *Svobodnaia mysl'* 21, 2 (February 2002): 89-91. Poliakov claims Pokhlēbkin slapped Director Mikhail Khvostov after he reprimanded Pokhlēbkin for not fulfilling a labor plan. Other accounts hold that Pokhlēbkin publicly berated Khvostov for encouraging timeserving and hampering researchers' productivity. *Smert' kulinar: Vil'iam Pokhlēbkin* [The Death of a Culinary Expert: Vil'iam Pokhlēbkin], dir. Mikhail Rogovoi (M.: Telekanal Rossiia, 2005), online video, Telekanal Rossiia, http://russia.tv/video/show/video_id/90793/brand_id/4747.

4. In childhood Pokhlēbkin longed to play in the kitchen, although the adults around him refused to allow him to explore such "girly" interests. He found the opportunity to develop his culinary skills only during his service as a regimental cook in the Second World War. V.V. Pokhlēbkin, *Tainy khoroshei kukhni* [The Secrets of Good Cooking] (M.: Molodaia Gvardiia, 1979), 12-19.

Soviet public that both enjoyed a higher standard of living than earlier generations and turned increasingly inward, toward forms of socializing that centered on interpersonal relationships and long evenings of conversation over food and drink.⁵ He eventually produced over 100 written works on cuisine, firmly establishing himself as a culinary legend in the Russian-speaking world by the time of his death in 2000. Today, Pokhlëbkin continues to hold a prominent place in the domain of Russian gastronomy, with his books in ongoing circulation and experts bowing to or sparring with his theories.

The present study investigates Pokhlëbkin's culinary thought and his legacy in post-Soviet Russia as a means of moving beyond dominant characterizations of the Brezhnev era. During this period, important changes swept Soviet culinary discourse, particularly as food writers looked to national history to enrich and renew the Soviet table. These changes suggest dynamism in the Brezhnev years, the likes of which some scholars now argue characterized the social, cultural, and intellectual life of this era better than the so-called "stagnation" paradigm.⁶ At the same time, this search for historical continuity reflects a desire for stability, a yearning for national and cultural roots, and a reaction against the political and social upheavals of the previous half-century. Significantly, this tendency persisted through the decades, drawing an arc of continuity from the 1970s through the early 2000s, and cutting across the ruptures of *perestroika* and collapse. Examining Soviet food culture offers a new perspective on questions of "stagnation" and "dynamism," allowing us to move toward a more satisfying characterization of the years between Brezhnev's consolidation of power in the late 1960s and the dawn of Gorbachev's reforms in the mid-1980s.

5. Alexei Yurchak argues that from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s for many Soviet citizens "belonging to a tight milieu of *svoi*, which involved constant *obshtchenie*, was more meaningful and valuable than other forms of interaction, sociality, goals, and achievements, including those of a professional career." Such socializing included endless "around the table drinking-eating-talking." Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 149. See also Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People: Changing Values in Post-Stalin Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 153-63. Reading habits are difficult to gauge, but the multiple editions and large print runs of Pokhlëbkin's major works suggest that publishers found them salable. By 1991, his *Chai, ego tipy, svoistva i upotreblenie* [Tea, Its Types, Properties and Use] (M.: Pishchevaia promyshlennost', 1968) had been published in three Russian editions, as well as Tatar and Polish; *Natsional'nye kukhni nashikh narodov* [The National Cuisines of our Peoples] appeared in multiple Russian editions, and in Finnish, German, English, Portuguese, Croatian, and Hungarian; and *Tainy khoroshei kukhni* appeared in six Russian editions. *Bibliografiia proizvedenii V.V. Pokhlëbkina i otzyvov na nikh v otechestvennoi i zarubezhnoi presse, 1948-1999 gg.* [A Bibliography of the Works of V.V. Pokhlëbkin and Reviews of Them in Domestic and Foreign Press, 1948-1999] (M.: N.p., 1999), 59, 63-64. Joyce Toomre notes that over one million Russian-language copies of *Natsional'nye kukhni* were published during the Soviet period, making it one of the most heavily published Soviet cookbooks, alongside *Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche* [The Book about Delicious and Healthy Food]. Toomre, "Food and National Identity in Soviet Armenia," in *Food in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Musya Glants and Joyce Toomre (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 213n39.

6. For an overview of the stagnation paradigm, see Edwin Bacon, "Reconsidering Brezhnev," in *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, eds. Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 1-21. Juliane Fürst discusses recent challenges to "stagnation" in "Where Did All the Normal People Go?: Another Look at the Soviet 1970s," *Kritika* 14, 3 (Summer 2013): 621-640.

Through his cookbooks and culinary prose, Pokhlēbkin aimed to rearrange the hierarchy of authority in the Soviet kitchen, elevating historical knowledge and practice above the advice of medical and nutritional scientists.⁷ His work thus articulates a viewpoint I describe as *gastronomic historicism*: the privileging of historical custom as the ultimate authority in food-related matters, including a reliance on historical information as a means of explaining dietary and culinary principles. The emergence of gastronomic historicism in the USSR supports the notion of a “historical turn” in late Soviet culture.⁸ Denis Kozlov has argued that a diverse “search for origins” marked late Soviet society, as certain groups “sought to legitimize their existence by constructing new historical continuities.”⁹ A sense of cultural loss and the Thaw-era disruption of official historical narratives energized the pursuit of stable, rooted identities. In the Brezhnev years, as Andrew Jenks suggests, “continuity with the past, rather than a radical break, became a central theme of cultural construction.”¹⁰

As part of this post-Stalin “search for origins,” members of the intelligentsia engaged in “politics by culture,” using journals and creative works to propagate a Russian nationalism that was often at odds with official policies.¹¹ Artists and intellectuals made increasing use of nationalist rhetoric to critique urbanization, industrialization, and environmental degradation, looking for truth and regeneration in national tradition and rurality.¹² Faced with waning enthusiasm for the Soviet project and an onslaught of ideologically threatening Western cultural influences, Soviet officialdom also embraced aspects of this historical turn, exploiting Russian nationalism to shore up political legitimacy.¹³ During the Brezhnev years, individuals and groups throughout the Soviet Russian socio-political hierarchy

7. My focus on concepts of authority in cooking advice literature is influenced by Alison K. Smith’s groundbreaking work on debates over the Russian diet in the prerevolutionary era. Smith, *Recipes for Russia: Food and Nationhood under the Tsars*, (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008).

8. Denis Kozlov, “The Historical Turn in Late Soviet Culture: Retrospectivism, Factography, Doubt, 1953-91,” *Kritika* 2, 3 (Summer 2001): 578. Catriona Kelly has identified a desire among segments of the late Soviet intelligentsia to create continuity between their own ideas, experiences, and lifestyles, and those of their nineteenth-century predecessors. Kelly, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 337-45. Andrew Jenks treats the Palekh artists’ community as an encapsulation of the Brezhnev-era use of primordial Russianness as the foundation of Soviet Russian identity. Andrew Jenks, “Palekh and the Forging of a Russian Nation in the Brezhnev Era,” *Cahiers du Monde russe* 44, 4 (October-December 2003): 629-55.

9. Kozlov, “Historical Turn in Late Soviet Culture,” 578.

10. Jenks, “Palekh and the Forging of a Russian Nation,” 642.

11. Yitzhak Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 4-15.

12. *Ibid.*, 150-91. Musya Glants argues that representations of food in late Soviet visual art indicate a desire for a return to national traditions, similar to that expressed in the Village Prose movement. Glants, “Food as Art: Painting in Late Soviet Russia,” in Glants and Toomre, *Food in Russian History and Culture*, 215-237.

13. Jenks, “Palekh and the Forging of a Russian Nation,” 654. In the mid-1970s Alexander Yanov predicted the intensification of the regime’s co-optation of nationalism. Yanov, *The*

engaged in a diverse and collective search for meaning, bowing—or at least paying lip service—to the authority of history and national “traditions,” as they sought better means of approaching the present and the future.

In the culinary sphere, this historical turn meant respecting “national” cuisines, the longstanding food customs they allegedly represented, and the wisdom that brought them into being.¹⁴ Pokhlëbkin used historical knowledge not only as a key mode of defining the cuisines he discussed, but also to criticize the culinary status quo and express anxiety over the deleterious effects of modernization. Initially a response to the conditions of Soviet life under Brezhnev, Pokhlëbkin’s concerns segued neatly into a critique of perestroika and, later, post-Soviet society, while also mirroring trends taking hold elsewhere in the world. During the 1990s, he espoused a more intensely nationalistic gastronomic historicism to counter the economic instability, foreign influence, and cultural degradation that, he believed, threatened Russian society. The burgeoning disillusionment of the Brezhnev era flowed steadily into the anxieties of the post-Soviet period. The ongoing popularity of Pokhlëbkin’s works and his legacy in Russia today speak to his ideas’ resonance with a public that craved stability and continuity with the past. Meanwhile, parallels between Pokhlëbkin’s ideas and public discourses about food in Europe and America suggest that, in certain ways, Soviet and some foreign food cultures evolved in tandem, responding to similar impulses and concerns. Rather than an isolated phenomenon of the age of “developed socialism,” gastronomic historicism represents the culinary facet of a search for roots that took place throughout the industrialized world in the late twentieth century; studying this development reveals commonalities between seemingly diverse geographic, political, and temporal spaces.

Recapturing Culinary Wisdom

Until the Brezhnev years, dominant Soviet food paradigms focused largely on the future, emphasizing what could be, rather than tackling contemporary conditions or considering the past. During the 1920s, food “futurists” admonished readers to eat a modern, rational diet based in part on “healthy” food surrogates, and to

Russian New Right: Right-Wing Ideologies in the Contemporary USSR, trans. Stephen P. Dunn (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1978).

14. As anthropologists have demonstrated, “national” cuisines are elaborate cultural constructions, used most often to define the character and boundaries of the national community. See, for example, Arjun Appadurai, “How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30, 1 (January 1988): 3-24. More recently, Alison K. Smith has argued that a national cuisine’s construction is influenced especially by “conceptions of ‘tradition,’ new products and modes of production and consumption brought about by trade and other contacts with foreigners, conscious discussion of a national cuisine, and conscious efforts to codify that cuisine.” Smith, “National Cuisines,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Food History*, ed. Jeffery M. Pilcher (New York: Oxford, 2012), 445. Also see Smith on the articulation of a Russian national cuisine in the prerevolutionary period, and this cuisine’s connection to nationalist ideologies: Smith, “National Cuisine and Nationalist Politics: V.F. Odoevskii and ‘Doctor Puf,’ 1844-45,” *Kritika* 10, 2 (Spring 2009): 239-260.

cast off home cooking in favor of communal dining. This would, they supposed, help transform individual and collective identities, aiding in the creation of a new Soviet person freed from the yoke of prerevolutionary customs. Traditional modes of eating still had their proponents, but most menus bore the mark of new dietary standards, demanding more fat and sugar and a broader range of proteins than would be found in a typical Russian peasant diet.¹⁵ Along with the Second Five-Year Plan (1933-37) and its propaganda trumpeting the dawn of a “better” life came a wave of culinary standardization. The Stalin regime, as Edward Geist argues, “developed a single orthodox cuisine and imposed this monopoly upon Soviet culture as a whole.”¹⁶ Here, futurist and traditionalist visions converged in a “socialist realist” food paradigm, uniting “bourgeois luxury” with “enthusiasm for a qualitatively new ‘scientific’ way of eating.”¹⁷ Mass-produced luxury foods and the ideal of dining out at chic cafés tantalized the public with a future when even common laborers would live as well as the late imperial bourgeoisie.¹⁸ Stalinist gastronomy reached its apotheosis in *Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche* [The Book About Delicious and Healthy Food, 1939], which advertised the successes of Soviet industry and agriculture, while teaching housewives—no longer targets for “liberation” from the kitchen—to be “cultured” consumers.¹⁹

After Stalin’s death, publishers made available a vastly wider array of cookbooks: *Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche* appeared in revised editions alongside new texts on housekeeping, cooking with common ingredients or convenience foods, and enjoying Soviet ethnic cuisines.²⁰ Many of these publications celebrated modes of cooking and dining rooted in modern nutritional science and technological advances, also touting Soviet successes in these spheres. As Natalia B. Lebina argues, the Khrushchev period saw an important shift toward Western (especially American) food culture, including the introduction of “rational” or “progressive” forms of trade and dining—self-service and automatic vending—and the increased use of prepared foods. The “glamour” and “luxury” of the Stalin period faded, as did the hardships of the war and immediate postwar years: Soviet food experts now

15. Halina Rothstein and Robert A. Rothstein, “The Beginnings of the Soviet Culinary Arts,” in Glants and Toomre, *Food in Russian History and Culture*, 177-194.

16. Edward Geist, “Cooking Bolshevik: Anastas Mikoian and the Making of the *Book about Delicious and Healthy Food*,” *Russian Review* 71, 2 (April 2012): 295.

17. *Ibid.*, 301.

18. Jukka Gronow and Sergey Zhuravlev, “The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food: The Establishment of Soviet *Haute Cuisine*,” in *Educated Tastes: Food, Drink, and Connoisseur Culture*, ed. Jeremy Strong (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 27. See also Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of the Good Life in Stalin’s Russia* (New York: Berg, 2003); Irina Glushchenko, *Obshchepit: Mikoian i sovetskaia kukhnia* [Obshchepit: Mikoyan and Soviet Cuisine] (M.: Vysshiaia shkola ekonomiki, 2010).

19. Geist, “Cooking Bolshevik,” 295-296. I use Geist’s translation of this volume’s title, which more accurately reflects the grammatical construction of the Russian title than the common English rendering, *Book of Tasty and Healthy Food*.

20. For a brief overview of the development of Soviet cookbook publishing, see Gronow and Zhuravlev, “Book of Tasty and Healthy Food.”

avored speed, convenience, accessibility, and uniformity.²¹ In the Khrushchev-era imagination, the future was, as Susan E. Reid contends, to be marked by “sober, rational taste appropriate to a modern, industrial, workers’ state.”²² Scientific rationality now reached a new apex, stripped of such Stalin-era fripperies as lace tablecloths and homemade aspics, and reified in the spread of soda water dispensers and heat-and-eat cabbage rolls.²³

From the mid-1960s through the 1980s, a tension between standardization and diversification increasingly defined Soviet culinary culture. Even as the state demanded that public dining menus and nutritional guidelines adhere to a rigid standard, Soviet citizens experienced unprecedented gastronomic diversity through cookbooks, the press, and greater travel opportunities.²⁴ Interest in home cooking grew as Soviet urbanites enjoyed higher living standards and more leisure time than previous generations. Cookbooks and pamphlets celebrating the national cuisines of the USSR presented the greatest variety of dishes, ingredients, and cooking styles. These national cuisines did not, of course, represent some concrete, primordial reality. Rather, they were the creations of food professionals engaged, however consciously or unconsciously, in a project of “imagining” the national community.²⁵ In the late Soviet context, these imaginings functioned as propaganda

21. Natalia B. Lebina, “‘Plus destalinizatsiia vsei edy...’ Vkusovye priorityty epokhi khrushchevskikh reform: Opyt istoriko-antropologicheskogo analiza [‘Plus the Destalinization of All Food...’ The Taste Priorities of the Era of Khrushchev’s Reforms: The Experience of Historical-Anthropological Analysis],” *Teoriia mody* 21 (Fall 2011): 213–42.

22. Susan E. Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev,” *Slavic Review* 61, 2 (Summer 2002): 218.

23. Reid argues that during the Khrushchev era the Soviet central government and consumer goods industry emphasized making daily life more “rational” and “socialist,” beginning with the kitchen. Susan E. Reid, “The Khrushchev Kitchen: Domesticating the Scientific-Technological Revolution,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, 2 (April 2005): 289–316.

24. Catriona Kelly asserts that cafeteria and restaurant menus were standardized throughout the USSR. Kelly, “Leningradskaia kukhnia, ili *La cuisine leningradaise*—protivorechie v terminakh? [Leningrad Cuisine, or *La Cuisine leningradaise*—A Contradiction in Terms?],” *Antropologicheskii forum* 15 (2011): 269. Gronow and Zhuravlev emphasize the variety of cuisines and dishes represented in post-Stalin Soviet cookbooks, although they note that the difficulties involved in procuring foodstuffs limited home cooks’ abilities to prepare exotic dishes. Gronow and Zhuravlev, “Book of Tasty and Healthy Food,” 51. On Brezhnev-era food shortages, see Anna Kushkova, “Surviving in the Time of Deficit,” in *Soviet and Post-Soviet Identities*, eds. Mark Bassin and Catriona Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 278–95. On the influence of foreign and domestic travel on Soviet worldviews in the Brezhnev era, see Donald J. Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers: An Oral History of Russia’s Cold War Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 210–17.

25. Benedict Anderson coined the now ubiquitous term “imagined community” as a means of describing modern conceptions of “nation” in 1983. For his definition, see Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 5–7. Scholars have likewise emphasized the “imagined” nature of national cuisines. Citing a number of fellow anthropologists, Sidney W. Mintz and Christine M. DuBois, for example, write, “once imagined, such [ethnic or national] cuisines provide added concreteness to the idea of national or ethnic identity. Talking and writing about national food can then add to a cuisine’s conceptual solidity and coherence.” Mintz and Dubois, “The Anthropology of Food and Eating,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002): 109. On national cuisines as cultural constructs, also see note 14 above.

for the “friendship of the peoples,” while also offering a tool for the preservation of local culture.²⁶ During the Brezhnev years, some Soviet food experts and home cooks began to turn away from—even if they did not wholly reject—science, technology, and the fictional bright future, looking increasingly to history and tradition for inspiration and authority in the kitchen.

Pioneering this trend, Pokhlēbkin insisted that Soviet home cooks would benefit from a renewed connection with fundamental culinary knowledge. In his columns for *Nedelia* (The Week, a Sunday supplement to *Izvestiia*) he suggested that Soviet citizens needlessly clung to prejudices against certain food items, such as wholesome fish and traditional sunflower oil, simply because they did not know how to properly consume them.²⁷ He also criticized an apparent disregard for good taste among cooks, whose incompetence yielded greasy gravies, and other food experts, whose “purely medical” approach to food championed unappetizing but “healthy” salads.²⁸ Pokhlēbkin suggested that chefs and scientists focused too much on the bare facts of nutrition, leaving aside food’s other characteristics: flavor, aroma, its ability to influence mood and to facilitate conviviality. Their ignorance of culinary customs led to the spread of bland, monotonous meals, while the lack of care evident in restaurants and canteens placed the burden on individuals to seek out gastronomic pleasure at home.²⁹ Pokhlēbkin thus made the case in his popular *Tainy khoroshei kukhni* for embracing national traditions and home cooking in spite of the existence of an extensive public dining system. Stopping short of an open critique of state-run eateries, Pokhlēbkin likened public dining to a new, modern bridge, while describing home cooking as “our old, but sure, true bridge, which connects us to the culture of the past and with the historical traditions of our Homeland, to the national customs of the people, and with our family, our loved ones.”³⁰

26. For example, the Planeta publishing house released a series of illustrated recipe cards as part of its mission to propagandize “the achievements of our country and brother countries in the spheres of economy, science and culture, the Soviet way of life, the peoples’ struggle against imperialism and colonialism, for peace and national independence.” GARF (Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi federatsii), f. R-9640, op. 1, d. 1, l. 1. Some ethnic cuisines cookbooks professed their commitment to preserving traditional culture. See, for example, A.V. Zotova, *Mordovskaia kukhnia* [Mordovian Cooking] (Saransk: Mordovskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1977); N.I. Kovalev, *Russkaia kulinarīia* [Russian Cuisine] (M.: Ekonomika, 1972). Such texts most often reflected what Nicholas V. Riasanovsky describes as the “Soviet solution” to the nationalities problem: the belief that “a transformed unitary society” could be achieved “best not by mixing different peoples in different stages of development but by having each nationality evolve to its own highest level, from which each could consciously and freely join others in a new higher synthesis.” Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities: A Historical Survey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 221–22.

27. V.V. Pokhlēbkin, “Labardan ili treska [Haberdine or Cod],” *Nedelia*, 17–23 May 1971, 10; Pokhlēbkin, “Chudesa na postnom masle [Miracles with Vegetable Oil],” *Nedelia*, 3–9 January 1972, 14–15.

28. V.V. Pokhlēbkin, “Sousy [Sauces],” *Nedelia*, 24–30 March 1975, 20–21; Pokhlēbkin, “Salaty [Salads],” *Nedelia*, 16–22 January 1978, 22–23.

29. On the standardization and quality of late Soviet public dining, see Kelly, “Leningradskaia kukhnia”; Glushchenko, *Obshchept*, 180–192.

30. Pokhlēbkin, *Tainy khoroshei kukhni*, 6.

In this quest to teach better living through home cooking, Pokhlëbkin addressed very real problems facing Soviet citizens. He understood that the supply deficits plaguing Soviet consumers often made it necessary to work with undesirable foodstuffs. While necessities such as bread generally remained available, some goods could be hard to acquire or of poor quality.³¹ He openly discussed cooking with low-quality ingredients in *Zanimatel'naia kulnariia*, claiming that anything short of outright spoilage could be “corrected through the culinary process.”³² Pokhlëbkin also offered instructions on using electric ranges, which had begun to displace common gas ranges and single-burner stoves, in spite of his disdain for the new technology, which he regarded as being largely unsuited for any kind of cooking outside of boiling or reheating.³³ He thus hinted that he understood the difficulties his readers faced in procuring desired products and working with the limited array of cooking equipment made available by state industry.

Pokhlëbkin did not, however, address the question of who exactly would be doing the cooking. Declining to endorse anyone’s “liberation”—let alone women’s—from the kitchen, he broke with official rhetoric promising female “emancipation” through such services as public dining.³⁴ He felt his readers should reject the resources the state offered them to ease their domestic burdens, including cafeterias and convenience foods. Pokhlëbkin viewed cooking as a critical life skill and the responsibility of all able adults, often addressing a neutral reader (*chitatel'*) or eater (*edok*), rather than a female housewife (*khoziaika*).³⁵ Yet Pokhlëbkin’s writings still fell into a genre understood as feminine and therefore also aligned with dominant expectations that wives and mothers would handle food procurement and preparation, in addition to their responsibilities outside of

31. Kushkova, “Surviving in the Time of Deficit”; Kushkova “Sovetskoe proshloe skvoz' vospominaniia o prodovol'stvennom defitsite [The Soviet Past Through Memories of Food Deficits],” *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* 64, 2 (2009), <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2009/2/ku10.html>.

32. V.V. Pokhlëbkin, *Zanimatel'naia kulnariia* [Cooking is Fun] (M.: Legkaia i pishchevaia promyshlennost', 1983), 19.

33. Ibid., 7-10; V.V. Pokhlëbkin, “Elektricheskaia kukhnia [Electric Cooking],” *Nedel'ia*, 2-8 October 1978, 14-15; Pokhlëbkin, *Kukhnia veka* [Cuisine of the Century] (M.: Polifakt, 2000), 413-14. On single-burner stoves, see N.B. Lebina, *Entsiklopediia banal'nostei: Sovetskaia povsednevnost': Kontury, simvol'y, znaki* [An Encyclopedia of Banalities: The Soviet Everyday: Contours, Symbols, Signs] (SPb.: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2006), 186-87, 291; Catriona Kelly, “Making a Home on the Neva: Domestic Space, Memory, and Local Identity in Leningrad and St. Petersburg, 1957-Present,” *Laboratorium* 3, 3 (2011): 62-63.

34. The state vowed repeatedly to “emancipate” women by socializing elements of domestic labor, thereby relieving women’s burden and allowing them to participate more fully in the workforce and the social-political life of the country. The “double-burden,” however, persisted throughout the Soviet era. Barbara Alpern Engel, “Women and the State,” in *The Cambridge History of Russia*, vol. 3, *The Twentieth Century*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 468-94, esp. 487-490. As Susan E. Reid suggests, in the postwar Soviet Union, “emancipation” meant, in real terms, that women worked outside of the home while maintaining primary responsibility for domestic matters. The modern Soviet housewife’s alleged need for advice to make family responsibilities more manageable drove a postwar boom in advice literature that continued into the 1970s. Reid, “Khrushchev Kitchen,” 296-299.

35. See for example, Pokhlëbkin, *Zanimatel'naia kulnariia*, 3.

the home.³⁶ His commitment to the revival of culinary knowledge and national tradition, then, may have helped reinforce a deeply imbalanced division of labor between the sexes. Pokhlēbkin challenged *not* the established gender order, in which Soviet women shouldered a double burden of domestic and professional responsibilities, but rather the culinary status quo of poor food standards in public dining and in Soviet homes.

Dining on History in the Brezhnev Era

Pokhlēbkin's gastronomic historicism comes through most clearly in his writings on ethnic cuisines, which identify knowledge of history as the foundation of proper cooking. His *Natsional'nye kukhni nashikh narodov*, described recently as "the first comprehensive Soviet ethnic cookbook," represented a landmark in the national cuisines genre, which had been growing since the 1950s.³⁷ Pokhlēbkin rooted this volume and related press articles in information he gathered during his travels throughout the USSR collecting recipes, cookbooks, and old cookware.³⁸ Concerned with cultural preservation, Pokhlēbkin went beyond offering recipes for popular dishes, such as Georgian lamb soup (*kharcho*) and Ukrainian dumplings (*vareniki*).³⁹ He drew attention to the place of forgotten or obscure dishes, such as Russian *tiuria* [bread and kvas soup], in national culture and history, while also

36. Cooking columns appeared most often in women's journals including *Rabotnitsa* and *Krest'ianka* or alongside articles on women's fashion and housekeeping in publications such as *Nedelia*. Soviet home cookbooks had, at least since the Stalin years, largely addressed housewives. Geist, "Cooking Bolshevik," 309. Brezhnev-era cookbooks continued to target the *khosiaika*, sometimes echoing the title of Elena Molokhovets' legendary prerevolutionary Russian cookbook, *Podarok molodym khosiaikam* [A Gift to Young Housewives]. See, for example, I.S. Kravtsov, *Sovety molodym khosiaikam* [Advice for Young Housewives] (Odessa: Maiak, 1970); V.I. Kapustina, S.M. Ziabreva, and T.V. Beznogova, *Sekrety khoroshei kukhni: Sovety molodoi khosiaike* [The Secrets of Good Cooking: Advice for Young Housewives] (M.: Pishchevaia promyshlennost', 1977); A.G. Bendel', *Kukhnia molodoi khosiaiki* [The Young Housewife's Kitchen] (Sverdlovsk: Sredne-Ural'skoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1982). On Elena Molokhovets, see Joyce Toomre, ed. and trans., *Classic Russian Cooking: Elena Molokhovets A Gift to Young Housewives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

37. V.V. Pokhlēbkin, *Natsional'nye kukhni nashikh narodov: Osnovnye kulinarnye napravleniia, ikh istoriia i osobennosti: Retseptura* [The National Cuisines of Our Peoples: The Fundamental Culinary Currents, Their History and Specificities: Recipes] (M.: Pishchevaia promyshlennost', 1978). Although national cuisine cookbooks began appearing in quantity during the 1950s, the genre did not come into its own until the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the number and variety of these publications increased considerably. Pokhlēbkin's *Natsional'nye kukhni* was under consideration for publication as early as 1974, but did not appear until several years later apparently because Pokhlēbkin fell ill and could not complete the manuscript on time. GARF, f. R-9659, op. 2, d. 108, l. 6.

38. Avgust Pokhlēbkin (son of V.V. Pokhlēbkin), in discussion with the author, Podol'sk, Russia, 15 July 2012. *Natsional'nye kukhni* is divided into eleven chapters, each dedicated to a cuisine or group of cuisines: Russian; Ukrainian; Belorussian; Moldavian; Caucasian; Uzbek and Tajik; Turkmen; Kazakh and Kyrgyz; Baltic; North Caucasian, Volga, Permian, Karelian, and Yakut; Subarctic, Mongolian, and Jewish.

39. Pokhlēbkin, *Natsional'nye kukhni*, 124, 73-74.

charting the political, social, cultural, and economic factors that drove a given cuisine's evolution up to the present.⁴⁰ In *Natsional'nye kukhni*, Pokhlëbkin thus pointed to Orthodox Christian fasting traditions in order to explain the slow development of Russian cuisine prior to the eighteenth century, arguing that the divide between Lenten and non-Lenten menus slowed the emergence of dishes that combined a variety of ingredients. European influence finally set Russians on the road to creating the dishes recognized today as Russian staples: *kotlety*, meat-filled *pirozhki*, and mayonnaise-rich salads.⁴¹ Elsewhere, he encouraged his readers to recapture the wisdom of the past and enjoy the simple pleasures of homemade "*pirog* with nothing" or marinated crowberries.⁴²

In his later Soviet-era works, Pokhlëbkin further committed to this vision of a deep connection between history, tradition, and good eating. In *Tainy khoroshei kukhni*, he attacked doctors, nutritional scientists, and their influence on the Russian diet. Presaging arguments he would make in his post-Soviet writings, Pokhlëbkin asserted that, while a doctor can describe the nutritional content of raw foods, only the cook, through the application of time-tested techniques, could make sure that the body absorbs these nutrients. Doctors cannot make food smell or taste good, but it is precisely these qualities that ensure that food will be truly healthful, sustaining the individual physically, emotionally, and psychologically.⁴³ Pokhlëbkin admonished his readers to heed advice stemming from culinary expertise and historical knowledge, rather than relying on the nutritional standards and standardized foods they found elsewhere. Pokhlëbkin pointed to the tendency of nutritional science to make "zigzags," repeatedly changing position on whether a particular food is healthful or harmful.⁴⁴ He also positioned his "culinary encyclopedia," *O kulinarii ot A do Ia*, as a necessary tool for "preserving and strengthening the best national traditions," which were crucial to the formation of "Soviet daily life."⁴⁵ For Pokhlëbkin, history and tradition represented the forces that could provide a way out of consuming tasteless, poorly prepared foods. His writings provided a necessary link for Soviet citizens to the principles and knowledge—in danger of being lost to time—that could provide them with a more joyful, satisfying, and delicious existence.

40. Pokhlëbkin placed *tiuria* in the pantheon of traditional Russian soups alongside *shchi*, *rassol'nik*, *solianka*, *okroshka*, and *botvin'ia*. Ibid., 13; Pokhlëbkin, "Shchi, borshchi, i prochie supy [Shchi, Borshch, and Other Soups]," *Nedelia*, 22-28 January 1973, 14-15. Other Soviet food writers rejected *tiuria* as an unwholesome relic of Russia's peasant past. A.I. Titiunnik and Iu.M. Novozhenov, *Sovetskkaia natsional'naia i zarubezhnaia kukhnia* [Soviet National and Foreign Cuisines] (M.: Vysshiaia shkola, 1977), 14; Kovalev, *Russkaia kulinariia*, 4.

41. Pokhlëbkin, *Natsional'nye kukhni*, 8-12.

42. V.V. Pokhlëbkin, "Pirogi," *Nedelia*, 16-22 August 1971, 19; Pokhlëbkin, "Lesnye lakomstva [Forest Delicacies]," *Turist* 8 (1974), 23.

43. Pokhlëbkin, *Tainy khoroshei kukhni*, 25-26.

44. Ibid., 21.

45. V.V. Pokhlëbkin, *O kulinarii ot A do Ia: Slovar'-spravochnik* [On Cooking from A to Z] (Minsk: Polymia, 1988), 7.

Pokhlēbkin believed that in order to properly prepare a given culture's dishes one had to understand the people's history and traditions. Pokhlēbkin thus outlined a canon of foods that made Russian cuisine distinctive: sour rye bread, numerous soups, and slow-cooked fish, mushroom, grain, and vegetable dishes. These items represented both Russia's native crops and also the distinctive cooking style developed through the use of the Russian oven (*rusaskaia pech'*), which cooked foods slowly at a falling temperature.⁴⁶ Yet, as suggested by his embrace of European innovations (noted above), Pokhlēbkin also celebrated those foreign influences and innovations that either complemented or improved upon the characteristics of Russian cuisine.⁴⁷ A robust cuisine, in his mind, accepted those new techniques, technologies, and foods that would complement but not overwhelm national characteristics. By extension, Pokhlēbkin hinted that Russian cuisine required responsible caretakers, such as himself, to guide its evolution, differentiating between beneficial and harmful influences.

Rather than simply suggesting that "old" meant "authentic" and therefore "good," Pokhlēbkin contended that the passage of time worked to refine and perfect cuisines. Pokhlēbkin, looking on one occasion beyond Soviet borders, described Chinese cuisine as an ancient and sophisticated complex of techniques, ingredients, and dishes, contrasting this with "unpalatable, unwholesome" American cuisine, a recent invention suited only to impatient twentieth-century life.⁴⁸ Taking this perspective, Pokhlēbkin hinted at his discomfort with the role of modern science in the sphere of food and drink. Similarly, in his earliest foray into food writing, *Chai, ego tipy, svoistva, upotreblenie*, Pokhlēbkin praised new achievements in growing and processing tea, and improvements in experts' understanding of tea's properties. Yet he also suggested that the "ancients" had already learned much of what modern scientists later labored to discover. Although thermodynamics, for example, could explain the necessity of warming the teapot, tradition held fast: The teapot must still be treated according to customs as old as the act of drinking tea itself. Modern science had, at best, used its powers to reaffirm what those of past generations already knew, improving on this knowledge mostly by systematizing it.⁴⁹

Although he focuses on history and "traditional" foods, Pokhlēbkin's vision of a full and satisfying gastronomic life would be attainable only in a modern, literate society. He offered his readers a means of revering their own national heritage while also celebrating the cuisines of their Soviet neighbors as part of the "true flowering" of national cultures under socialism.⁵⁰ Between 1970 and

46. Pokhlēbkin, *Natsional'nye kukhni*, 12-14. Experts on the prerevolutionary Russian diet tend to select the same foods as typically Russian. R.E.F. Smith and David Christian, *Bread and Salt: A Social and Economic History of Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Toomre, Introduction to *Classic Russian Cooking*.

47. Pokhlēbkin, *Natsional'nye kukhni*, 8-12.

48. V.V. Pokhlēbkin, "Kitaiskaia kukhnia [Chinese Cuisine]," *Aziia i Afrika segodnia* 4 (1981): 50-52

49. Pokhlēbkin, *Chai, ego tipy, svoistva, upotreblenie*, 94, 65-73.

50. Pokhlēbkin, *Natsional'nye kukhni*, 3. Here, Pokhlēbkin taps into the "Soviet solution" (Riasanovsky's term) for the nationalities problem, as described in note 26 above.

1982, Pokhlëbkin published numerous articles on not only Russian food, but also Ukrainian, Georgian, and Central Asian cuisines, topics on which he considered himself an authority. Pokhlëbkin also wrote on food customs in such countries as China, Scotland, and Finland.⁵¹ He thus set out to “internationalize” culinary knowledge by disseminating information about foods, cooking techniques, and cookware in order to further cross-cultural understanding and improve home cooking and professional gastronomy.⁵² Such efforts at knowledge circulation, Pokhlëbkin insisted, demanded literacy and education. In *Tainy khoroshei kukhni*, he called on Soviet home cooks to learn both skills and historical narratives in order to “literately” (*gramotno*) prepare tasty and healthy meals.⁵³ He explained that in the past the strong continuity of cultural traditions allowed some “illiterate old ladies” to cook well almost effortlessly, but a person who had no experience of these customs—such, he implied, as the average Soviet home cook—must study and practice in order to succeed in the kitchen.⁵⁴

Pokhlëbkin’s advocacy of historical traditions sometimes belied his promotion of innovation. Coaxing Russians into eating saltwater fish, for example, he promoted a substitute for the longstanding Russian custom of dining on lake and river fishes. In this case, he aligned with officials in Soviet trade and the food industry, whose efforts to sell seafood reached new heights in the 1970s in the face of meat shortages and vanishing freshwater fish.⁵⁵ Pokhlëbkin, however, promoted only the home preparation of dishes found in traditional cuisines, not the consumption of pre-prepared and factory-made fish products in a cafeteria setting.⁵⁶ He also advised the use of accessible, affordable sugar (instead of honey) to make preserves, and to experiment with salting a variety of fruits and vegetables, rather than sticking to the customary cucumbers, cabbage, and mushrooms of old

51. V.V. Pokhlëbkin, introduction to *Shotlandskaja kukhnia* [Scottish Cuisine], by Jane Warren (M.: Legkaia i pishchevaia promyshlennost’, 1983), 3-6; Pokhlëbkin, introduction to *Bliuda kitaiskoi kukhni* [The Dishes of Chinese Cuisine], by Li Tsin (M.: Legkaia i pishchevaia promyshlennost’, 1981), 3-19; Pokhlëbkin, introduction to *Finskaia natsional’naia kukhnia* [Finnish National Cuisine], by Hilka Uusivirta, trans. and ed. Pokhlëbkin (M.: Legkaia i pishchevaia promyshlennost’, 1982).

52. Pokhlëbkin, *O kulinarii ot A do Ia*, 3-7.

53. Pokhlëbkin, *Tainy khoroshei kukhni*, 5, 7-8.

54. *Ibid.*, 27-28.

55. The Soviet Ministry of Trade supported opening specialized fish stores and fish counters in food stores throughout the USSR during the 1970s. See for example, RGAE (Rossiiskoi gosudarstvennoi arkhiv ekonomiki), f. 465, op. 1, d. 1007, l. 14-15. In 1976 “fish day” was introduced at cafeterias across the country as a means of making up for shortages of meat. Glushchenko, *Obshchepit*, 186. On the impact of environmental degradation on Soviet fisheries, see D.J. Peterson, *Troubled Lands: The Legacy of Soviet Environmental Destruction* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 76-78. Meat shortages persisted throughout the Brezhnev years. The Soviet Ministry of Trade addressed this problem at trade conferences and saw it appear in consumer complaints. See for example, RGAE, f. 465, op. 1, d. 1007, l. 13; RGAE, f. 465, op. 1, d. 3082, l. 75.

56. Pokhlëbkin, “Labardan ili treska”; Pokhlëbkin, “Dary Neptuna na nashem stole [Neptune’s Gifts on Our Table],” *Nedelia*, 2-8 July 1973, 14-15.

Russian cuisine.⁵⁷ Here, Pokhlēbkin bowed to realities facing Soviet consumers—limited supplies and lack of choice—and sought means of retaining long-time kitchen favorites (raspberry jam) while also experimenting with unfamiliar foods (saltwater fish) available in Soviet stores. Although he rejected elements of culinary modernization, Pokhlēbkin did not advocate a return to the past insofar as that would be shutting oneself off from the availability of nourishing and enjoyable dishes from throughout the USSR and abroad. Pokhlēbkin instructed his readers to use the contemporary world’s advantages wisely, exploring them with a critical eye and without rejecting established tradition.

Fighting “Culinary Stupidity”

Pokhlēbkin’s nationalism, latent during the Soviet period, became pronounced in his post-Soviet writings, where he drew on his earlier rhetoric of gastronomic historicism to find solutions to new problems. While still encouraging his readers to take up the best other cultures had to offer, Pokhlēbkin now also emphasized the importance of consuming primarily dishes from one’s “own” national cuisine in order to maintain individual and cultural wellbeing.⁵⁸ For Pokhlēbkin, much of Russianness resided in food, and each step away from old customs, which Russians rich and poor formerly embraced, dealt a blow to national health and identity.

After 1991, enjoying his new freedom to criticize the Soviet state, Pokhlēbkin blamed poor health and bad diet on governmental mismanagement.⁵⁹ He now declared that “culinary stupidity” and Soviet officials’ medicalization of food had burdened Soviet citizens with unpalatable, low quality, and unhealthy fare.⁶⁰ The Russian public had grown “too naïve and trusting” of medical experts’ advice during the twentieth century, and had therefore fallen into dreadfully unhealthy eating habits. Confronting Soviet medical experts’ proclamations, beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, that fats contribute to heart disease and obesity, Pokhlēbkin now insisted that a dish’s healthfulness hinged on its preparation, not its fat content; “culinary illiteracy” and artificial fats caused the health problems that so concerned Soviet doctors.⁶¹ Soviet food had been standardized, the culinary arts had declined

57. V.V. Pokhlēbkin, “Varen’ie [Preserves],” *Nedelia*, 20–26 September 1971, 14; Pokhlēbkin, “Solēn’ia [Salted Foods],” *Nedelia*, 18–24 September 1972, 14–15.

58. V.V. Pokhlēbkin, *Moia kukhnia i moe meniu* [My Cooking and My Menu] (M.: Tsentrpoligraf, 1999), 245–246. This is a collection of previously unpublished recipes and essays Pokhlēbkin wrote during the 1980s and 1990s.

59. Pokhlēbkin, like other Soviet cultural producers, faced censorship and ideological constraints. He could not publish newspaper columns that featured goods absent from Soviet stores, and the first edition of *O kulinarii ot A do Ia* was stripped of certain entries (e.g., “Vodka”) in order to conform with Gorbachev-era anti-alcohol campaigns. *Smert’ kulinara*; Mushkina, *Taina kurlandskogo piroga*, 306–7.

60. Pokhlēbkin, *Kukhnia veka*, 301, 330.

61. Pokhlēbkin, *Moia kukhnia i moe meniu*, 55, 276–77.

in status, and public dining had become, in Pokhlëbkin's words, "one of society's most purulent sores."⁶² He argued that when Russians finally renewed their interest in cooking during the 1970s, they had to start from square one. Cultural wisdom had vanished and some people could not even identify Russian dietary staples.⁶³ The foolish meddling of bureaucrats and doctors, according to Pokhlëbkin, wrought havoc on public health and cut Russians off from their national traditions. Disheartened, Pokhlëbkin did not represent one of the Russians who looked "back upon the Brezhnev era as a time when Russian national traditions were nurtured and protected," although the connection of his works with this era may stimulate such feelings in his readers.⁶⁴ Rather, he railed against the degradation of the national diet both during and after the Soviet period, declaring that, in order to enjoy healthy, delicious food, one must rely on tradition, not modern or alien innovations.

Yet Pokhlëbkin did not wholly reject foreign cuisines, instead praising "internationalization," while condemning the process by which cuisines became "cosmopolitan." Here Pokhlëbkin reproduced a murky distinction, pervasive in postwar Soviet discourse, between positive and negative forms of foreign influence. As Yurchak explains, "cosmopolitanism was described as a product of Western imperialism, which, in pursuit of its materialist goals, strove to undermine the value of local patriotism among the peoples of the world, thereby weakening their national sovereignty." Meanwhile, "internationalism," a "good and enriching" form of foreign influence, stood as cosmopolitanism's opposite, representing a progressive international culture, rather than a product of imperialism.⁶⁵ Pokhlëbkin, exploiting the vagueness of these concepts, argued that culinary internationalization involved the dissemination of traditional cooking methods from around the world, elements of which could be incorporated into other national cuisines.⁶⁶ Cosmopolitanization, meanwhile, described standardization and modernization, especially the universalization of a narrow range of cooking technologies and industrially produced foods.⁶⁷ Pokhlëbkin's use of "cosmopolitanism" carried no obvious taint of anti-Semitism, as the term had in other contexts, although he did employ it to signify dishes that evinced a suspicious lack of "national specificities."⁶⁸ Best represented by American-style dining, cosmopolitan cuisine prized uniformity and convenience over good taste, seasonality, or wholesomeness.⁶⁹ Russians, Pokhlëbkin insisted, ought to dabble in foreign food traditions, experiencing

62. Ibid., 269.

63. Ibid., 324.

64. Jenks, "Palekh and the Forging of a Russian Nation," 654.

65. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 162-63.

66. Pokhlëbkin, *Moia kukhnia i moe meniu*, 108-109; Pokhlëbkin, *O kulinarii ot A do Ia*, 3-7.

67. Pokhlëbkin, *Moia kukhnia i moe meniu*, 108-109.

68. On "cosmopolitanism" as part of Stalin's persecution of Soviet Jewry, see Elena Zubkova, *Russia After the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-1957*, ed. and trans. Hugh Ragsdale (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 135-38.

69. Pokhlëbkin, *Kukhnia veka*, 367, 472.

a “process of culinary enlightenment,” developing good taste, and becoming “cultured.”⁷⁰ Simultaneously, they were to avoid fast food, “eclectic” dishes not related to any national cuisine, and prepared convenience foods. For Pokhlēbkin this stood as the only way to “guarantee the preservation of Russian cuisine’s national distinctiveness” and to renew the “national spirit.”⁷¹ Working to understand foreign cuisines, in Pokhlēbkin’s mind, represented part of an effort to preserve Russian national cuisine, to build a strong and stable cultural base for daily life.

In the 1990s, Pokhlēbkin spoke to a larger trend in post-Soviet Russian food culture, namely a heightened desire for foods that could be interpreted as fundamentally Russian. During this period, the introduction of foreign food products and restaurants, in combination with growing income inequality and a seeming loss of collective values, spurred a nationalist backlash in the culinary sphere. Food advertising and packaging drew on cultural-historical allusions to exploit nostalgia for the past, while also appealing to “a nationalist pride that [reinforced] the specificity of a Russian experience at odds with the encroaching outside world.”⁷² According to Melissa L. Caldwell, post-Soviet Russian consumers who made “nationalist” food choices did so both because these foods appeared more wholesome and familiar, and also because they offered a connection to a larger, imagined Russian community, a bulwark against declining collective responsibility, poor health, and socioeconomic stratification.⁷³ Even wild and homegrown foods tapped into Russian “geographic nationalism,” being perceived as the bearers of cultural values, by virtue of growing from the Russian soil.⁷⁴

Appropriately, Pokhlēbkin also set about defending the places of vodka and tea in Russian culture. Insisting that Russian rye and river water rendered vodka authentic, he labeled the products of foreign liquor firms “pseudo-vodkas.”⁷⁵ He decried the Gorbachev government’s decision to reduce vodka production as ignorant; it betrayed the regime’s blindness to the workings of history.⁷⁶ Having grown bitter at the decline of domestic tea production in the 1980s and 1990s, Pokhlēbkin blamed Georgian leaders and tea producers for Russia’s new need to import tea, a once-foreign product that Russians had long ago assimilated to their own cultural practices. Georgians, he wrongly claimed, did not drink tea, did

70. Pokhlēbkin, *Moia kukhnia i moe menu*, 111.

71. Ibid., 183.

72. Melissa L. Caldwell, “The Taste of Nationalism: Food Politics in Postsocialist Moscow,” *Ethnos* 67, 3 (2002): 39.

73. Ibid.

74. Melissa L. Caldwell, “Feeding the Body and Nourishing the Soul: Natural Foods in Postsocialist Russia,” *Food, Culture and Society* 10, 1 (2007): 43-71; Caldwell, *Dacha Idylls: Living Organically in Russia’s Countryside* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 74-100.

75. V.V. Pokhlēbkin, *Istoriia vodki* [A History of Vodka] (M.: Inter-verso, 1991), 224, 236-37.

76. Ibid., 258-59.

not want Russians to have it, and therefore sabotaged production.⁷⁷ Pokhlëbkin thus responded to the apparent intrusion of undesirable Western influences into Russian cultural space, also taking it upon himself to attack those within the USSR or Russia whom he held responsible for shortages of key products or for their declining quality.

Pokhlëbkin's more obvious nationalism stemmed largely from the disillusioning potential of historical study and his experience of the ongoing social, political, and economic upheavals of the late 1980s and the 1990s.⁷⁸ In the uncertain climate of the first post-Soviet decade, food for many Russians—Pokhlëbkin and his admirers included—represented not only sustenance or a tool for conviviality, but also a medium through which they could experience their own Russianness. Rather than a new development, this represented a continuation of the nostalgia and nationalism—and their attendant gastronomic historicism—that had blossomed during the Brezhnev years. Pokhlëbkin's Soviet-era writings, like his publications of the 1990s, relied on a vision of primordial ethnicity that had grown in prominence in the late Soviet period. Pokhlëbkin had in the 1970s lauded the “flowering” of national cultures throughout the USSR. Yet the climate of the 1990s seemed wrong for nurturing Russian national culture, and the conditions of the Brezhnev era, however welcoming they had seemed at the time to cultural restoration, had apparently not allowed for a true national culinary revival. Over the course of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, Pokhlëbkin witnessed declining culinary standards, growing interethnic tensions, and the introduction of state projects that, in his view, ignored historical realities. In the 1990s, Pokhlëbkin's discourse grew politically charged, more Russocentric, and more critical of anything he perceived as a deleterious influence on specifically Russian national culture. The continuity of these concerns and priorities in his work over three decades suggests that the ideas Pokhlëbkin expressed in the 1990s grew out of the late Soviet experience, remaining intimately connected to his Soviet-era gastronomic historicism and to late Soviet nationalist revivalism. Pokhlëbkin reacted angrily to the apparent realization of the fears underlying the Brezhnev-era search for historical continuity and cultural stability, as global fast food and economic crisis widened the gulf between Russians and their national culinary heritage.

77. V.V. Pokhlëbkin, *Chai i vodka v istorii Rossii* [Tea and Vodka in Russia's History] (Krasnoiarsk: Krasnoiarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1995), 288. This is a revised edition of *Chai, ego tipy, svoistva, upotreblenie*, published together with *Istoriia vodki*. Darra Goldstein notes that tea, introduced in the nineteenth century, developed a strong presence in Georgia during the Soviet era when the Georgia was the USSR's leading tea producer. Goldstein, *The Georgian Feast: The Vibrant Culture and Savory Food of the Republic of Georgia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 6.

78. Denis Kozlov posits that “nationalist images” emerged in response to a “disturbed consciousness” that developed from intense historical inquiry. He writes, “While nationalism does not tell the whole story, it is probably true that the late Soviet historical debate proved culturally pluralistic and politically divisive. Having started a collective reflection, it diverged across myriad social, ethical, cultural, educational, political, and ethnic differences.” Kozlov, “Historical Turn in Late Soviet Culture,” 600.

Embracing Gastronomic Historicism

Both during the Soviet period and after 1991, Pokhlēbkin's work resonated with readers extensively enough to ensure that his books sold well and that his name has continued to serve as a marker of culinary expertise. Hailed as a "magician" in the Soviet period, Pokhlēbkin's name later began to appear alongside that of Elena Molokhovets, author of *Podarok molodym khoziaikam*, a nineteenth-century text regarded as the most important Russian cookbook of the prerevolutionary era.⁷⁹ In the Russian press, food columnists now invoke Pokhlēbkin's ideas to add an air of authority to their articles on everything from cakes to barley to vodka.⁸⁰ Among intellectuals who came of age in the Soviet 1970s, Pokhlēbkin achieved near cult status. Zinovii Zinik credited Pokhlēbkin with inspiring his 1986 novel *Russofobka i fungofil* (published in English as *The Mushroom Picker*), which features an enigmatic professor "Pokhlobkin" mentoring a food-obsessed intellectual.⁸¹ Literary critic Petr Vail' labeled Pokhlēbkin a "cultural hero," praising him for teaching Soviet citizens to enjoy dining and cooking as part of the good life.⁸² Critic and gastronome Aleksandr Genis, meanwhile, declared Pokhlēbkin a literary giant whose readers, members of a "world-wide secret society," share a "spiritual kinship."⁸³

Yet not all responses to Pokhlēbkin's food writing have been wholly positive. I.A. Sokolov took Pokhlēbkin to task in a 2011 monograph on the Russian tea trade for contradicting himself on the question of tea's accessibility at the end of the nineteenth century.⁸⁴ Western reviewers of *Istoriia vodki* (published in English as *A History of Vodka* in 1992) pointed out factual inaccuracies, suggesting that the volume would be more profitably read with bottle in hand.⁸⁵ In Russia, Boris Rodionov penned an entire

79. "Volshebniiaia kukhnia Pokhlēbkina [Pokhlēbkin's Magical Cookery]," *V mire knig* 4 (1982): 65; "Borshch nashei zimy [The Borshch of Our Winter]," *Trud*, 17 January 2008, 32; Anastasiia Barashkova, "Syrnaia golovushka [A Little Ball of Cheese]," *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 16 September 2007, 41; Irina Mak, "Sobrat', no ne solit' [To Gather, Not to Salt]," *Izvestiia*, 25 November 2005, 29. On Molokhovets see Toomre, *Classic Russian Cooking*.

80. See for example, Tat'iana Mar'ina, "Tortik dlia liubimoi babushki [A Cake for a Beloved Granny]," *Sankt-Petersburgskie vedomosti*, 29 September 2010, 6; Irina Mak, "Naslazhdaia's' zhemchuzhnoi kashei [Enjoy Pearl Porridge]," *Izvestiia*, 3 December 2010, 7; Svetlana Gromova, "Osobennosti russkogo vkusa [The Peculiarities of Russian Taste]," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 28 April 2003, 10. As of September 2012, a search for Pokhlēbkin's name on celebrity chef Maksim Syrnikov's popular LiveJournal blog yielded over 130 items. Kare_1 (Syrnikov), *Reaktsionno-kulinarnyi ZhZhurnal* (blog), <http://kare-1.livejournal.com>.

81. Zinovii Zinik, "Emigratsiia kak literaturnyi priem [Emigration as a Literary Device]," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 20 March 1991, 11.

82. Petr Vail', "Veselyi stol [The Happy Table]," in Pokhlēbkin, *Kukhnia veka*, 7.

83. Aleksandr Genis, "Khleb i zrelishe [Bread and Circuses]," *Zvezda*, 1 January 2000, 220; Genis, "Pokhlēbkinu [To Pokhlēbkin]," in *Kolobok: Kulinarne putshchestviia* [Kolobok: Culinary Journeys] (M.: AST, 2006), 206-219.

84. I.A. Sokolov, *Chai i chainaia torgovlia v Rossii, 1790-1919 gg.* [Tea and the Tea Trade in Russia, 1790-1919] (M.: Sputnik, 2011), 41.

85. David Christian, Review of *A History of Vodka* by V.V. Pokhlēbkin, *Slavic Review* 53, 1 (Spring 1994): 245-47; Geraldine Sherman, "Varmints Made off with Their Drink: A History of Vodka," *Globe and Mail*, 23 January 1993. Mark Lawrence Schrad offers a detailed

book to debunk Pokhlëbkin's claims about vodka, arguing in the main that it cannot be considered a "national drink," since modern vodka was the product of state initiatives, not traditional distillation methods.⁸⁶ In his view, Pokhlëbkin played fast and loose with the historical record, ignoring the distinctive character of earlier Russian distillates, which did not necessarily "evolve" into modern vodka. Meanwhile, celebrity chef Maksim Syrnikov, Pokhlëbkin's self-proclaimed heir, corrects the old master's work when certain details seem insufficiently historical.⁸⁷ While critiques such as Sokolov's focus rightly on factual and logical errors, more persistent criticisms from the likes of Rodionov and Syrnikov indicate the continuing relevance of gastronomic historicism in contemporary Russian food culture. Not only do these experts continue to debate with Pokhlëbkin, they put forth arguments that ultimately hinge on a deep concern, much like Pokhlëbkin's, for the preservation of national culture.

While Pokhlëbkin's influence remains limited primarily to the Russian-speaking world, his ideas fit into larger, international constellation of concerns about modern diets. In recent decades, many societies have, as Warren Belasco asserts, begun to critique the "modern industrialized food system," condemning either the quality of the foods it produces or its mode of production, and thereby depicting modern food as "uninteresting, unnatural, dangerous, and inequitable."⁸⁸ Pokhlëbkin reserved most of his ire for the former target—the foods he perceived as poor quality and unhealthy—while his criticisms of the industrial mode of production typically focused on its potential to degrade Russian national culture and morality, not on labor conditions, animal welfare, or the environment. Still, his desire to return to more "authentic" cooking practices found parallels outside of Russia. The second half of the twentieth century saw a fresh wave of cookbooks touting the virtues of home cooking based on local customs. In postwar West Germany, cookbooks used recipes for "traditional" German foods to connect home cooks to culinary traditions throughout Germany, including areas that were not part of the FRG, as a means of creating a new and, in Alice Weinreb's words, "digestible" postwar nation.⁸⁹ Similarly, in postcolonial Britain in the 1970s Jane Grigson and other cookbook authors celebrated good English fare and imagined a small and cozy nation.⁹⁰ In the

discussion of the inaccuracies in—and controversies surrounding—*Istoriia vodki* in *Vodka Politics: Alcohol, Autocracy, and the Secret History of the Russian State* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2014).

86. Boris Rodionov, *Bol'shoi obman: Pravda i lozh' o russkoi vodke* [A Big Fraud: Truth and Lies about Russian Vodka] (M.: AST, 2011).

87. Maksim Syrnikov, "Eshche raz pro kundiumy [Once More on Kundiumy]," *Sait Maksima Syrnikova* [Maksim Syrnikov's Website], last modified 16 August 2012, http://syrnikov.ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=76:2011-12-06-06-36-00&catid=1:latest-news&Itemid=50.

88. Warren Belasco, "Food and Social Movements," in Pilcher, *Oxford Handbook of Food History*, 482.

89. Alice Weinreb, "The Tastes of Home: Cooking the Lost Heimat in West Germany in the 1950s and 1960s," *German Studies Review* 34, 2 (2011): 359.

90. Kate Colquhoun, *Taste: The Story of Britain through its Cooking* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 361-364.

United States during the 1960s and 1970s, food experts and writers reacted to social, cultural, and political upheaval, a rising tide of ethnic revivalism, and a longstanding American fascination with French cuisine by concerning themselves with food traditions rooted in American soil, embracing everything from frontier cookery to “soul food.”⁹¹ In the socialist world outside the USSR, food discourses also served as conduits for ethnic identities and “banal nationalism,” as in Yugoslavia where cookbooks appearing in the 1970s and 1980s often set the “authentic, traditional” cultures of individual ethnic groups (or sometimes the whole “Yugoslav people”) in opposition to modern foods and lifestyles.⁹²

More explicit critiques of the modern industrial food system also gained traction in the late twentieth century and after. In North America and Europe, food experts, individual consumers, and political activists launched attacks against the industrial and fast foods that had grown in popularity since the postwar years. By the 1970s, segments of the American population openly rejected these products through grass-roots efforts to block the opening of new fast food franchises or by propagating urban legends about food contamination, while professional food critics decried the popularization of junk food.⁹³ Some Europeans embraced “American-style” foods and food service for their taste, novelty, or convenience, while others associated these products with the erosion of tradition, declining public health, and American cultural and economic imperialism. Out of this milieu grew the Slow Food Movement, which activist Carlo Petrini founded in 1986 to protest opening of a McDonald’s in Rome.⁹⁴ Slow Food provides an especially important piece in this puzzle, as contemporary food writers influenced by this ideology—which advocates gastronomic pleasure, home cooking with local and seasonal ingredients, and a rejection of the mainstream Western diet—present us with striking parallels to Pokhlēbkin’s thought.⁹⁵ Most notably, journalist Michael Pollan has, like Pokhlēbkin, argued for a rejection of allegedly science-based diets that focus on calories and nutrients, promoting instead a return to cultural traditions.⁹⁶ Both Pokhlēbkin and Pollan, moreover, see their respective nations’ mainstream diets as rootless in terms of national culture. Pointing to what he describes as America’s “national eating disorder,”

91. Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 213-26; Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 175-201; Matthew Frye Jacobsen, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

92. Wendy Bracewell, “Eating Up Yugoslavia: Cookbooks and Consumption in Socialist Yugoslavia,” in *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe*, eds. Paulina Bren and Mary Neuberger (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 185-91.

93. Steve Penfold, “Fast Food,” in Pilcher, *Oxford Handbook of Food History*, 294.

94. Carlo Petrini, *Slow Food: The Case for Taste*, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 1-7; Geoff Andrews, *The Slow Food Story: Politics and Pleasure* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008), 11-12.

95. On Slow Food ideology, see Andrews, *Slow Food Story*, 3-64.

96. Michael Pollan, *In Defense of Food: An Eater’s Manifesto* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 1-15.

Pollan states that this situation, in which Americans have become simultaneously health-obsessed and remarkably unhealthy, would never have arisen “in a culture in possession of deeply rooted traditions surrounding food and eating.”⁹⁷ Pollan cites America’s lack of a “single, strong, stable culinary tradition” as the core reason for Americans’ susceptibility to the unwise interventions of the food industry and nutritional science quackery.⁹⁸

Was Pokhlëbkin aware of developments outside of his home country? It is difficult at best to uncover the exact pathways by which foreign influences made their way to a given Soviet thinker, but Pokhlëbkin did leave behind some clues as to his contact with foreign food writing. In *Cuisine of the Century*, he listed the “greatest culinary experts of the twentieth century,” praising in particular certain chefs from Russia, Europe, and the United States.⁹⁹ Here Pokhlëbkin expressed his admiration of American chef James Beard who believed in “simple, natural, honest food [...] that can be eaten with delight.”¹⁰⁰ Pokhlëbkin amassed an impressive library that included Danish, Swedish, and German cookbooks, a rare English-language volume on Cambodian cookery, and a 1967 edition of *Nouveau Larousse Gastronomique*.¹⁰¹ Pokhlëbkin fluently read Serbo-Croatian, Estonian, several Scandinavian languages, and German. He also made use of English- and French-language texts, presumably understanding these well enough to get by with the aid of his bilingual dictionaries.¹⁰² This peek into his library, which has yet to be catalogued, suggests that the world of late Soviet cuisine did not evolve in a vacuum of state socialism, as one of the gastronomic guiding lights of the final Soviet decades absorbed developments from beyond Soviet borders.

Of course, all experts and activists promoting “slow,” “national,” or “traditional” meals do not express identical agendas or espouse a single ideology. As Caldwell has highlighted, Russians’ interest in wild and “ecologically clean” products grows not from an environmentalist counter-culture, as in Western Europe and North America, but from a belief that Russian nature will care for the Russian people.¹⁰³ Yet these contrasts should not obscure the important convergence that we see in the development of gastronomic discourse in Russia, Europe, and North America. Pokhlëbkin, like culinary crusaders elsewhere in the world, sought to renew the nation through its kitchen, responding to the seemingly deleterious effects of modernization and urbanization by serving forth history and national culture in

97. Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 2.

98. *Ibid.*, 5.

99. Pokhlëbkin, *Kukhnia veka*, 438.

100. *Ibid.*

101. I enjoyed the privilege of visiting Pokhlëbkin’s former home (in Podol’sk, Russia), now the residence of his son, Avgust Pokhlëbkin, during the summer of 2012. I am grateful to Avgust for this opportunity and for his generous hospitality.

102. Pokhlëbkin, discussion.

103. Caldwell, *Dacha Idylls*, 78–80.

the place of frozen meals and “cosmopolitan cocktails.”¹⁰⁴ In the second half of the twentieth century—a time when national and imperial fictions appeared to be unraveling, and when consumers viewed global, industrial food systems with increasing suspicion—food experts and home cooks around the world began to dig up their culinary roots, combining personal explorations with a desire to return society to an imagined familiarity and domesticity by harnessing seemingly stable aspects of food culture.

Conclusion: Redefining Culinary Authority

In the Brezhnev era, Pokhlēbkin’s cookbooks and gastronomic prose embodied a new current in Soviet food writing, advocating cultural renovation through a recapturing of national traditions and lost wisdom. While other food writers took part in this movement, Pokhlēbkin remained its most prominent representative and now stands in the pantheon of great Russian food writers. His work represents neither the science-and-industry gospel of Stalin-era socialist realist foodways nor the just-add-water “rationality” of the Khrushchev era. Rather, Pokhlēbkin aimed to revive historical traditions, enriching the contemporary table with dishes tested by time and the experience of countless cooks. After 1991, he persisted to believe that Russians ought to know and rely upon their own national traditions, while embracing the best of what other cultures had to offer, in order to sharpen their own sense of national identity, to live healthier lives, and to better understand other peoples. Tapping into a vein of nationalism and a desire for historical continuity that ran from the Brezhnev era through the 1990s, Pokhlēbkin promised that respecting and perpetuating Russian traditions would provide the physical, moral, and cultural nourishment he and many of his fellow Russians craved.

In championing tradition, packing his books with historical information, and appearing to unmask truths about foods familiar and forgotten, Pokhlēbkin desired to recalibrate his reader’s conceptions of authority in the culinary realm. Russians, should, in Pokhlēbkin’s view, set aside trendy diets and convenience foods, instead returning to (or creating anew) a life in which good food plays a key role. He thus rejected the earlier paradigm in which dining required constant expert mediation by food industry officials, nutrition scientists, and food service workers; this, Pokhlēbkin believed, had cut Russians off from cultural heritage and inherited wisdom. He turned his back on modern authorities, cataloguing instead the fundamental skills and information necessary to eat and live well independently of bureaucrats and specialists.

Pokhlēbkin wanted to enlighten the Russian people, who supposedly had so long depended upon prepared foods and meager rations that they could no longer even properly boil noodles. By taking this approach, Pokhlēbkin rearranged the hierarchy

104. Pokhlēbkin, *Kukhnia veka*, 394.

of trust and authority that existed in the Soviet kitchen.¹⁰⁵ From the 1930s through the 1960s, science, medicine, and industry reigned supreme, with experts offering advice that claimed to tap into this necessary body of knowledge. In Pokhlëbkin's conception, however, history and experience rested at the top of the hierarchy, his own writings serving as the conduit for this information. Pokhlëbkin's work thus attempted to alter one of the trust relationships that guided food choices within the USSR, as he sought to undermine the reader's faith in scientists, doctors, and industry, while establishing his own credibility through his historical and culinary expertise. Moreover, having thus established his authority, Pokhlëbkin then granted access to this font of wisdom, thereby empowering the reader in gastronomic matters. Pokhlëbkin revealed, to echo historian of science Steven Shapin, "the facts of the matter," offering up the tools one would need to navigate (or abandon) the complex world of modern, urban food culture.¹⁰⁶

The fact that Pokhlëbkin's message held and continues to hold so much appeal not only points to cultural continuities between the Brezhnev era and the first post-Soviet decades; it also suggests ambivalence toward the advances of the modern era, at least in the sphere of food culture. Had all his readers retained their faith in science and industry and remained comfortable with allowing these entities to put food on their plates, Pokhlëbkin would likely have faded into obscurity. Instead, portions of the Russian public proved ready to follow Pokhlëbkin on a search for a new authority, a new source of knowledge, which could offer an alternative to standardized cafeteria chow, prepared foods, and the seeming cultural instability of late modernity. Pokhlëbkin's gastronomic historicism served as encouragement to Russian readers seeking to reclaim a lost or vanishing national heritage, while tapping into a broadly shared desire for historical continuity and stability that took shape both within and outside of Russia at the end of the twentieth century.

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105. Steven Shapin argues that in the "credibility-economy" claims to authority can be strengthened through two different modes of accessibility: "On the one hand, where we have independent access to the 'facts of the matter,' we may be able to use that knowledge to gauge the claims of experts. On the other hand, the representation of expert knowledge as far beyond lay accessibility can serve as a recommendation for its own truth." Shapin, *Never Pure: Historical Studies of Science as if It Was Produced by People with Bodies, Situated in Time, Space, Culture, and Society, and Struggling for Credibility and Authority* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 30.

106. *Ibid.*, 30.