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soviétique**

In memoriam

Paul Bushkovitch

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IN MEMORIAM

The passing of Marc Raeff, like that of any scholar of his magnitude, means the passing of an individual but also the passing of a generation. More than any other historian of Russia in the United States, Raeff was the link with the Russian emigration and with Europe as well.

Raeff was part of the first generation of historians of Russia to be trained under the direction of Michael Karpovich at Harvard after the Second World War, a generation that included Richard Pipes, Martin Malia, and many others. These were to be the historians that created Russian history as a discipline in the United States, where it existed before only in a few universities, notably Harvard and the University of California at Berkeley. They were the first to try to explain Russian history to American and generally Western audiences, relying on the work of pre-revolutionary historians and the few pioneers in Germany and France. In the difficult conditions of the Cold War, with its political pressures and lack of access to Soviet libraries and archives, they created an intellectual framework for the subject, one with roots in the Russian past but also engaged with the intellectual debates among historians of Europe at the time.

Among that group Raeff was perhaps the closest to the culture of the emigration, though he was born after the end of the Civil War and spent his early years in Germany and France, too young to participate in the adult émigré world. In his work and his teaching, however, the presence of pre-revolutionary Russian culture was dominant. It is not that he clung to that world and made it an unchanging ideal, as did so many émigrés. It is simply that the Russia of the eve of the Revolution was his reference point, the source of literature and ideas that he came to modify or even reject, but the source nevertheless. In an academic world that valued the latest monograph just because it was new or adopted a fashionable viewpoint, Raeff always started with the classics of Russian historiography, whatever they were and of whatever date. His reference point was not just the literature of historical studies, but Russian culture in general, something that as part of the Russian intelligentsia, he simply took for granted as the context of the historian's work.

Russian history in Raeff's mind was part of the history of Europe. He devoted much of his work to explaining how and why Russia did or did not deviate from the main directions of European history. In this task he worked not from a textbook knowledge of Europe, as have so many Russian, and unfortunately also so many Western, historians. European history and culture was something that he absorbed

from his family, in school in France, and in the American libraries where its products rest in such enormous quantity. He brought to the study of Russia a broad field of vision in a discipline where the obvious connections to the West frequently lay unnoticed. To his students, he was a constant reminder that work in Russian history is not complete if the European scholarship is not integrated and the European historical context left out.

Raeff would probably be surprised to be remembered for his connection to older Russian scholarship and to Europe, things that were to him so basic that he seemed scarcely conscious of them. Many changes in academic life have made these particular parts of his heritage even more important, particularly to his students in the United States. All of us who had the privilege to work under him absorbed these values, and they became the standard by which we would judge our own work.

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Access to Russian archives, limited as it was to most pre-1917 repositories, came too late to be of much help to him in his own work. For most of his career he concentrated on the larger issues of Russian history and culture, the story of the intelligentsia or the attempts of eighteenth century monarchs to remake the country on the basis of European ideas of state. For Raeff the mental world of the holders of power, social elites, and those who contested them, were central parts of the historical experience, just as much as legal structures or social forms. Perhaps the book that best conveyed his quality as a historian was not one of his monographs, but the 1980 lectures in Paris that appeared as *Comprendre l'Ancien Régime russe*. Here he tried to define the broad sweep of Russian history to the Revolution. The book has all of him in it, the European context, the strong heritage of Russian historiography, but also the probing and questioning that was so prominent in conversation and teaching. It contains insights and even descriptions that take the reader way beyond the accepted notions of 1980. Such, for example, his insistence that Peter the Great's "revolution" aimed at the implantation of European education and techniques to produce a society that could innovate and produce. This formulation is not only clearer than most attempts to describe Peter's achievement, but it also points clearly to the directions in which historians needed to go. Raeff had an ability to provide a precise description that in itself suggested new realms to be explored. The short accounts in these lectures of the contents of the *Pravda voli monarshei* of Prokopovich, or of the factions at the court of Alexander I are unsurpassed and raise many questions about the usual approaches to both.

The Paris lectures are also of a type with his teaching at Columbia University. His seminars were dense with sources. One year he gave a seminar on the history of Russian education, seen mainly through memoirs and letters. At first what he was doing was not obvious, it seemed a lot of time to devote to a secondary issue. In fact it gradually became clear that we were receiving a thorough grounding in the history of Russian culture, one that was unforgettable and left his students with

issues to ponder for the rest of their careers. He led us through the material in a quiet way, neither pushing us nor holding us back. He himself had a sort of undogmatic consistency in his thinking, and he was happy for us to argue with him. We did not convince him, and he was perfectly happy if he did not fully convince us, as long as the dialogue was serious. He did not believe in historical “schools”, in which the student devotes his life to illustrating the thoughts of the teacher. His legacy to us was much more durable. For Marc Raeff’s students, he is still a presence in our minds, someone with whom we are still discussing things, arguing with him at times and at other times just remembering how he worked out a problem.

Paul Bushkovitch