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is a revolutionary transformation from "bourgeois" to "proletarian" biology that would permit the Soviet Union to revolutionize peasant agricultural practices is one explanation. After all, Stalin's rise to power was accompanied by a period known as the "Great Break," which involved forced collectivization of agriculture and cultural revolution directed against perceived enemies of the state, including the better-off peasants and such so-called bourgeois remnants as scientists and educators. But as Soyfer indicates, Lysenko himself was often unaware of the need for ideological consistency, and he was much more effective in achieving his dominance through power politics.

It may be that in rejecting genetics and embracing Lamarckian notions of the inheritance of acquired characteristics, Lysenko's science was commensurate with Stalinist pronouncements about the primacy of changes in the political and economic spheres to bring about revolutionary social changes. But this explanation, not fully developed in Soyfer's book, does not get us closer to understanding Lysenko's staying power and effective destruction of genetics through 1965. Soyfer shows us how the brilliant, energetic, and productive Vavilov faced fire for empire-building, that is, for securing and dominating a broad institutional basis for his research program, like his counterpart in physics, Abram Ioffe. But why did Lysenko not face this charge?

After Stalin's death in 1953 it appeared that Lysenko would rapidly fall from favor. Leading biologists attacked Lysenko's theory of the transformation of one species into another and those of his associate, Olga Lepeshinskaia, who claimed to have created life in the laboratory. Several new institutes opened. And physicists who had acquired great authority owing to their successes in building nuclear weapons established a series of laboratories in their institutes that employed geneticists to evaluate the effects of radiation on living things. Furthermore, Lysenko usually failed to deliver on his promises; his "experiments" lacked rigor; when his methods increased yields it was because of the way he was able to organize peasants to work more efficiently in the hated collective farms, and because of the greater resources he had in his hands—equipment, fertilizers, and better seeds—not because of scientific advances. Future studies may wish to examine how the Stalinist system permitted entire fields of research to be dominated by one individual or institution.

Soyfer's passionate study remains a welcome resource for those interested in the history of Soviet science and Soviet history.

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As the first comprehensive Western study of the development of the Soviet atomic bomb, David Holloway's book deals with a subject of key importance for historians of the Cold War and of Stalinist politics. Holloway provides a detailed account of Soviet atomic-energy policy from the discovery of nuclear fission in 1938 to the mid-1950s, when the Soviets first tested thermonuclear weapons. His book has three main themes: the development of Soviet nuclear weapons, the relationship between scientists and the political system, and the effect of nuclear weapons on international relations. Holloway does a good job of weaving his narrative around these three themes to provide a readable and coherent history of Soviet atomic policy in the Stalin and early Khrushchev periods.

At the centerpiece of the book is Joseph Stalin himself, who, as the supreme dictator, set in motion the Soviet program to build the bomb. Although he learned from Soviet intelligence reports about work on the bomb in the United States and Great Britain during World War II, Stalin did not realize the implications of the atomic bomb until the United States demonstrated its power at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. At this point Stalin gave the atomic program top priority, committing tremendous economic and scientific resources to developing the bomb. This was precisely the type of project for which a socialist command economy was well suited, and, within just four years, the Soviets were able to test successfully the first atomic (plutonium) bomb. As Holloway points out, the inherent contradiction between scientific autonomy and totalitarianism was to a great extent overcome by the sense of urgency and purpose that the Soviets attached to the bomb project. However suspicious Stalin was of his scientists, he had no choice but to rely on them, and hence allow them a certain amount of independence, if he wanted to compete successfully with the United States in developing the bomb.

In examining Soviet nuclear policy against the backdrop of international developments after the war, Holloway concludes that nothing could have deterred Stalin from the goal of developing thermonuclear weapons. Stalin wanted to catch up with the United States at all costs and no restraint or conciliatory gestures on the part of American policy makers could have lessened his determination.

Although Holloway avails himself of sources that have become available since glasnost, including memoirs of the Soviet atomic project, he uses few Soviet archival documents. As a result, his book provides little in the way of revelations. We do not learn a great deal, for example, about the espionage contribution to the development of the Soviet bomb or about the accusations of treason against Western scientists made in the controversial book by former NKVD official Pavel Sudoplatov (Special Tasks: The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness, a Soviet Spymaster [1994]).

In one case, Holloway even confuses the issue of intelligence gathering. He suggests that the Soviets delayed in developing the bomb because NKVD Chief Lavrentii Beria did not believe the intelligence reports...
he was receiving on atomic research in the West. But—and this is attested to by Soviet archival documents that have been made available—it was Beria who initiated and directed the ambitious atomic espionage effort from the beginning of the war. And it was Beria who, in early 1942, first drew Stalin’s attention to American and British plans for an atomic bomb.

This book offers few new insights into the actual process of decision making under Stalin because it is based on the traditional premise that Stalin himself made all the decisions on key issues. Thus, it tells us little about the impact of leadership politics on Soviet policies toward the atomic bomb and relations with the West. Holloway assumes that Stalin was in complete control of policy making until his death, but there is much new evidence to indicate that in fact his subordinates, although clearly afraid of Stalin and outwardly subservient to him, were engaging in independent policy initiatives by the early 1950s. At the Nineteenth Party Congress in October 1952, as confirmed later by Nikita Khrushchev, Viacheslav Molotov, and others, Stalin was barely following policy issues. He managed only to climb up on the podium at the end of the Congress to give a brief speech. Yet Holloway insists that Stalin “dominated the proceedings” (p. 291).

Although Russian archives dealing directly with issues like the atomic bomb and espionage are still closed, a careful culling of the party archives might have yielded some valuable information about what was going on in the Soviet leadership when key decisions regarding the bomb and international politics were made. Holloway’s book makes an important contribution, but, as he himself acknowledges, the story he tells is “incomplete and provisional” (p. 364).


In this ambitious book, Nina Tumarkin continues her efforts to trace the “great legitimizing myths that . . . long sustained the Communist Party’s mandate to rule” (p. 187). Her important study, Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia (1983), examined how Bolshevik leaders employed V. I. Lenin’s memory to solidify the young Soviet state. Here she investigates the state-organized remembrance of World War II, which served as a method to bolster faith in the socialist system.

Tumarkin also has a personal agenda in this wide-ranging study. While tracing the Soviet Union’s excruciating national ordeal, she hopes to “confront and push beyond the great pain of my own life: the untimely deaths of my father, brother, and sister, all of whom died before the age of fifty” (p. 2). She relates the Russians’ trauma through her own, particularly her sister’s long ordeal with leukemia. Personal narrative is intertwined with historical narrative throughout the book.

The constructed cult of World War II began with the first shots on the battlefield, argues Tumarkin. From the outset Soviet leaders used it to obscure the government’s own mistakes. The regime blamed the demon enemy for the sufferings of the Soviet population, even as it put its own citizenry at risk. Not only did Joseph Stalin fail to prepare for the invasion, a well-known story, but also army commanders were forced to attack German forces even against hopeless odds. Recent excavations at battle sites have revealed that the military’s “scorched-earth” policies included the execution of ill and immobile Soviet citizens before German troops arrived.

In the immediate postwar period, Stalin encouraged a history of the war that enhanced his own role as military genius and minimized the contributions of anyone else. His nemesis, Nikita Khrushchev, employed the memory of the war for opposite ends. He made Stalin’s failures as a war leader a central piece in his de-Stalinization campaign. During the Khrushchev years, memoirs and novels began to emerge examining the population’s role in the victory and revealing some of the hardships citizens had suffered to secure it.

Under Leonid Brezhnev the cult of the war reached its high point, hardening into a “master narrative” that transformed the ordeal into the central event of Soviet history. According to this account, the trials of industrialization and collectivization were justified to prepare the country for war. Although millions died in the onslaught of the fascist beast, ultimately the Communist Party, led by Stalin, saved the country and all of Europe from fascism. To promote this version of the war, the Brezhnev regime saturated public space with heroic art and sponsored compulsory commemorative events. This strategy aimed to shame the younger generation, increasingly skeptical about the Soviet regime’s accomplishments, to appreciate the sacrifices of those who had freed the world from fascism.

This carefully constructed version of the war began to unravel in the Mikhail Gorbachev era and ultimately collapsed with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. New revelations, such as the publication of the real terms of the Nazi-Soviet pact, led many to question the regime’s intentions. At the same time, alternative versions of the conflict emerged from right-wing nationalists, who stressed the unique sufferings of Russians and tinged their accounts with anti-Semitism. A unified history of the war dissolved along with political consensus.

Tumarkin does not attempt to document the internal decisions of the Soviet leadership in its constant struggle to mobilize the nation through the war. Rather, she interrogates the keepers of the cult, the museum directors, sculptors, and elementary school teachers whose task it was to communicate a sacralized version of the war to the population at large. She also gives voice to artists, historians, and ordinary people who attempted to bring the war’s memory back down