



EURASIANISM: A REAFFIRMATION OF EMPIRE

Posted on October 1, 2022 by Grégoire Quevreur



Contemporary Eurasianism is undoubtedly marked by the strong personality of Alexander Dugin (1962). However, Eurasianist thought cannot be reduced to that of the latter (which he does not claim). At the same time, the Eurasianist movement has been able, during the two clearly differentiated phases of its history, to gather original and independent thinkers (and regularly in disagreement), while keeping a very specific intellectual identity.

Pyotr Savitsky: Father of Eurasianism and Theorist of Topogenesis

Eurasianist thought was born in exile at the beginning of the 1920s, at the initiative of certain White Russian intellectuals. Its main theorists were [Prince Nikolai Trubetzkoy](#) (1890-1938) and [Pyotr Savitsky](#) (1895-1968). The Eurasianist movement gradually broke up during the 1930s, before disappearing after the Second World War: the fairly complex thinking of Eurasianism was probably no longer suited to the simplistic confrontation of ideologies typical of the Cold War. However, Eurasianism experienced a revival in Russia in the 1990s (it was then referred to as neo-Eurasianism), around the personalities of Alexander Dugin and Alexander Panarin (1940-2003). It is not insignificant to note that the two historical phases of Eurasianism reacted each time to a fall: the fall of the "White Empire" of the Romanovs for classical Eurasianism, and the fall of the "Red Empire" of the USSR for neo-Eurasianism. We can thus readily define Eurasianism as a will to rethink the fundamentally imperial identity of Russia, at times when it seemed threatened with dissolution.

Before Eurasianism

If the double birth of Eurasianism is thus linked to precise contexts, the latter was obviously not constituted like Athena already emerging armed from Zeus' brain. Without falling into the always somewhat vain exercise of "searching for precursors," it is obvious that Eurasianism is rooted in a typically Russian intellectual soil, inaugurated by the father of Slavophilism, [Aleksey Khomyakov](#) (1804-1860). He interpreted history as the confrontation of two principles: the Iranian principle and the Kushite principle. These two principles were conceived as covering all the structural dichotomies of the world. To the Iranian/Kushite opposition thus corresponds the oppositions freedom/determinism, spirituality/ materialism, peasant civilization/industrial civilization, autocracy/plutocracy, Orthodoxy/Catholicism and Protestantism, East/West. Khomyakov thus radically opposed to a Kushite West an Iranian East, to which he integrated Russia. This integration of Russia with the East nourished Khomyakov's interest in Iran and India (he would go so far as to learn Sanskrit to be able to read in the

original the classical works of Hinduism). This conception of a Russia, open to the East but closed to the West, would become a constitutive pillar of Eurasianism.

The work of [Constantine Leontiev](#) (1831-1891) can be seen as a link between nineteenth-century slavophilism and twentieth-century Eurasianism. The latter, a veteran of the Crimean War, conceived of "Western progress" as a globalist and aggressive process of standardization of humanity from below. In contrast, he defended a diversity of men and cultures, finding its unity in a common imperial identity. This dialectic of the respect of the human diversity in the unity of the empire, put in opposition with the petty-bourgeois uniformity of the Western State-nation, will find itself in the Eurasianist thought. Thinking that the future of Russia was not in Europe but in Asia, Leontiev invited his compatriots to consider themselves no longer as Slavs, but as "Turanians" (the term "Turanians" designating, in the vocabulary of the time, the Turko-Mongolian peoples of Central Asia). Inaudible for his contemporaries, this renewal of Russian identity proposed by Leontiev will find an echo among Eurasianists.

The Idea of Eurasia

Eurasianist thought is vast and embraces many fields and themes. It is thus impossible to reveal it in its entirety here (we would in any case be hard pressed to give an account of Nicolai Trobetzkoy's structural linguistic work). However, Eurasianists share a common way of conceiving the Eurasian discourse in itself. Totally anti-constructivist, Eurasianist thought considers that Eurasia pre-exists in its essence. The idea of Eurasia is an Idea, in the Platonic sense of the term, and the purpose of the Eurasianist discourse is therefore not to construct it, but to unveil it. This Eurasian Idea is thus fundamentally revealed in a territory that is neither Europe nor Asia, but a third continent: Eurasia. That the Idea of Eurasia is revealed in the territory of Eurasia may seem a very trivial statement, but it is not. Indeed, it means that, for the Eurasianists, Eurasia is a fact of nature, whose unity and specificity will have to be demonstrated by the geographical sciences. Eurasianism is thus thought of, on the theoretical level, as a scientific demonstration of the Eurasian Idea. Eurasian thought is thus characterized at the same time as a metaphysics and as a science (Trubetzkoy thus spoke of a geosophy of Eurasianism).

This naturalistic conception of Eurasia explains why the delimitations of the latter have never been the object of a clear consensus among Eurasianists, without them regarding this state of affairs as a real problem. Indeed, being defined by geographical and not historical-political criteria, Eurasia is not delimited by borders in the strict sense of the term, but rather by peripheral zones, by boundaries.

Globally, Eurasia corresponds to the territory of the former USSR. In the East, Mongolia and possibly Tibet are generally added to it. Dugin excludes the Kuril Islands, which he proposes to return to Japan. The problem of the eastern limits of Eurasia has never really worried Eurasianists, insofar as they think of an opening of Eurasia to Asia, and see in the Asian countries natural allies in the face of Western hegemony (Alexander Panarin, who was a professor of political philosophy at Moscow State University, thus theorized the construction of a Sino-Eurasian alliance against the American "new world order").

The problem of the Western limits of Eurasia is quite different, and has been of great concern to Eurasians (which is explained by their conception of a Eurasia closed to the West). The Eurasian territory is also based on that of the former USSR, excluding the Baltic States and the enclave of Kaliningrad, and with the addition of Bessarabia for some. Ukraine is considered Eurasian, but suffers from a very ambiguous status. As a western boundary of Eurasia, and because of its historical links with Poland, Ukraine is seen as having been largely influenced by the West (to such an extent that Eurasianists called the westernization of Russia in the Petersburg period "Ukrainization"). As a result, Eurasianists always considered that an independent Ukraine detached from Russia could not be anything other than a Trojan horse of the West in Eurasian unity.

The Concept of Topogenesis

Alexander Dugin describes this basically continental Eurasian space as "tellurocratic," characterized by a traditional and socialist spirit, and opposes it to a "thalassocratic" Atlantic space, modern and capitalist (an opposition that we already find, *mutatis mutandis*, in *The Peloponnesian War*, where Thucydides opposes a "tellurocratic" and aristocratic Sparta to a "thalassocratic" and democratic Athens). The geographical opposition between a continental Eurasian space and a maritime Atlantic space is thus coupled with a civilizational opposition. Eurasian thought holds that civilization is conditioned (and not determined) by place. This is what Pyotr Savitsky proposed to call "topogenesis" (and which he considered a scientific concept): A specific geographical space conditions a specific civilization. To the Eurasian space thus corresponds a Eurasian civilization.

In the eyes of Eurasianists, religion is at the foundation of any civilization. The Eurasian civilization is thus for them fundamentally Orthodox. Atheism, deism, Catholicism, or Protestantism are seen as Western elements, foreign, and even opposed to Eurasian civilization. Thus, with a few exceptions, all Eurasianists are explicitly Orthodox. However, without questioning the sincerity of the personal faith of the Eurasianists, some criticized the ensuing notion that Russian Christianity thus does not seem to be

based on a supernatural revelation, but simply as an expression of the Eurasian topogenesis; Father Georges Florovsky distanced himself from the movement for this reason, seeing in it a naturalistic reduction of the Christian mystery. Nevertheless, Eurasianists always remained conscious that not all Eurasians are Orthodox, and stressed that Russian Orthodoxy, while keeping its central role, can recognize, esteem, and fraternize with other Eurasian religious expressions. Thus, in the inter-war period, the Jewish Eurasianist [Yakov Bromberg](#) defended the existence of a specifically Eurasian Jewishness through the Khazar experience. More recently, Dorji-Lama, a spiritual leader of the Kalmyk Buddhists, joined Alexander Dugin's Eurasianist organization.

But it is especially to Islam that the Eurasianists opened up, underlining the precocity with which the Russian empire was equipped with a representative institution of the Muslims of Russia (the great Muftiate of Russia was created by the empress Catherine II in 1788), and not forgetting that 40% of the citizens of the ex-USSR were Muslims. They held the existence of a specifically Eurasian Islam, Turkic, and influenced by Sufism and Shiism (Wahhabi Islam is on the other hand absolutely rejected as non-Eurasian, and being totally subservient to hated America). Dugin, mobilizing a conceptuality drawn from his reading of René Guénon, affirmed that Turkic Islam and Russian Orthodoxy are both linked in their essence to the "Primordial Tradition" (as well as all the authentically traditional religions) coming from "Hyperborea," which he situates in Siberia (this conception is not foreign to Russian mythology; indeed, in the fourteenth century the archbishop Basil of Novgorod affirmed the existence of a secret terrestrial paradise in Siberia, which obviously refers to the biblical myth of the Garden of Eden and is very reminiscent of the Buddhist myth of Shambhala). Muslim personalities thus drew closer to Eurasianism: Talgat Tadzhuiddin, former grand mufti of Russia, joined Dugin's Eurasianist movement; and especially Nursultan Nazarbayev, former president of Kazakhstan and promoter of a specifically Turkic Eurasianism, distinct from the properly Russian Eurasianism (and to whom Dugin devoted a dithyrambic book).

As we can see, topogenesis is neither a determinism nor a universalism; it conditions and adapts that which exists. The various religions and cultures of Eurasia keep their particular identity, while showing common civilizational traits, making them all converge in the Eurasian unity, understood as a community, both natural and mystical, of destiny. The concept of topogenesis is thus a nodal point of Eurasian thought, where a dialectic of the one and the many is woven, founding an imperial affirmation of identity that respects (but also embraces) the particular identities of Eurasian peoples. It should also be noted that this strictly organicist conception leaves no room for individual choice—a Mormon Tatar who loves the country cannot be anything but a dangerous anomaly from a Eurasian perspective).

A Differentialist Critique of Western Universalism

This notion of topogenesis is also the basis of the Eurasian critique of Western universalism. The latter is understood as postulating the existence of a unique human civilization, the different cultures being only the expression of this unique civilization at different historical stages of advancement, obviously leading to the Western model, seen as the most advanced and most desirable historical stage of humanity (Eurasianists note that white supremacism is finally only a naturalized form of this universalism). Western civilization is thus seen as the goal of all humanity, and its model of development as the unique direction of history. Alexander Panarin considers that this superiority complex of the West comes from the obvious power of its industrial and consumerist model, while underlining that the contemporary ecological crisis undeniably demonstrates its harmful character.

To this historicist universalism of the West, justifying its political hegemony as well as the cultural westernization of the world, Eurasianists resolutely oppose a "geographist" differentialism. In their eyes, the Western model is absolutely not universal. As we have already said, each geographical space corresponds for Eurasianists to a given civilization, the Western model therefore legitimately and exclusively corresponds to the Western geographical space. Eurasianism thus defends an incommensurability and an equality of civilizations between them, which must each be respected in their specificity. The inexpiable fault of the West is thus to have believed itself superior to the rest of the world, granting itself the right to invade it "for its own good," scorning thereby the irrefutable right of each people to remain itself and to develop according to its own internal logic; that is to say to remain faithful to its own topogenesis. The Eurasianists thus always presented themselves as anti-colonialists and Third Worldists (and this already in the 1920s; that is to say at a time when this was not yet fashionable). In France, Aleksander Dugin came closer to the New Right led by Alain de Benoist, which also carried a differentialist critique of Western universalism, while Aleksander Panarin, for his part, came closer to certain researchers from postcolonial studies. The latter affirmed in this respect that the providential mission of Eurasia is to take the lead in the revolt of the Third World against Western hegemony.

Eurasia as Ideocracy

Panarin's Eurasian messianism undeniably reproduced certain "tics" of Russian nationalism. It is an observation that can be extended to the whole of Eurasianist thought, which grants Orthodox "Holy Russia" the role of the "spearhead" of Eurasia. Eurasianists, however, have always denied being

reactionary. In the 1920s, they strongly criticized White Russians who stubbornly remained monarchists, and instead claimed to be "futurists" (and even "cosmists" for the most left-wing). If they rejected the Marxist ideology, they saw in the Soviet experience an important step in the process of political incarnation of the Eurasian Idea. For the Eurasianists, the Russian people, Orthodox and theophore, were providentially elected to carry out this process, i.e., to make the Eurasian empire come true. The latter, political incarnation of the Eurasian Idea, is thus understood by Eurasianist thought as an ideocracy, aristocratic and authoritarian regime, of religious and socialist essence, expressing the Eurasian organicity.

The Eurasianists trace the history of the constitution of the Eurasian ideocracy, through a historical meta-narrative breaking with traditional Russian historiography. Indeed, the Rus' of Kiev is thus seen as denying its usual founding role. Only Saint Vladimir of Kiev (958-1015), for his historical choice of Byzantine Christianity, and Saint Alexander Nevsky (1220-1263) are preserved. The latter, confronted in the East by the Mongols, and in the West by the Teutonic Knights (launched in the famous Baltic, or Northern Crusades), chose to recognize the suzerainty of Batu Khan, grandson of Genghis Khan, and to oppose the Teutonic Knights—thus making the choice of Eurasia against the West (the Eurasianists also contrasted Saint Alexander Nevsky with another Russian prince, Daniel of Galicia, who made the opposite choice, and whom they condemned to hell-fire for that; one finds here the dual character of Ukraine in Eurasianist thought)—because it is indeed the Mongolian empire which is seen as the matrix of the Eurasian ideocracy. The Eurasianist historiography, in an original way, thus rehabilitated Genghis Khan and the Genghisids. Lev Gumilev (1912-1992) pointed out the Christian dimension of the Mongol empire, including among its high aristocracy (the mother of Kublai Khan, emperor of China and grandson of Genghis Khan, was a Church of the East Christian princess). While traditional Russian historiography sees in the affirmation of Muscovy a founding struggle for national liberation against the Mongols, Eurasian historiography sees in Moscow the heir to the Mongol empire. The providential mission of the Russian people is therefore to bring to its historical completion the work that the Mongolian people started: the constitution of the Eurasian ideocratic empire.

It is difficult to assess the influence of Eurasianism on contemporary Russian politics. Those who have made Dugin into an *eminence grise* of the Kremlin, or even into a Eurasianist of President Putin, have probably greatly exaggerated. However, it would be wrong to underestimate the capacity of Eurasianist thought, with its mystical, political and scientific roots, to infuse some of its ideas into the state ideologies of the countries of the former USSR (as the examples of Russia, Kazakhstan and, to a lesser extent, Kyrgyzstan demonstrate).

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[Featured](#): "The Road in the Rye," by Grigoriy Myasoyedov; painted in 1881.

