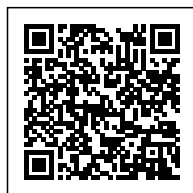


# RUSSIA: TRADITION AND SACRED GEOGRAPHY

*Posted on May 1, 2022 by Bertrand Garandeanu*



Regularly under the spotlight for his supposed influence on the Kremlin, Alexander Dugin has taken up and developed the geopolitical concept of Eurasia. Through this notion, he advocates the use of sacred geography and tradition in contemporary geopolitics.

For Dugin, geopolitics is not a science like any other. If alchemy and magic have disappeared in favor of their modern and secular forms, such as chemistry and physics, the sacred geography of the ancients remains alive through geopolitics. Recalling the Heartland theory of the British geopolitician Halford John Mackinder, Dugin makes Eurasia the centerpiece of sacred geography. With Russia at its center, Eurasia embodies the last bastion of tradition in the northern hemisphere, the only one capable of fighting effectively against modernity.

The Russian thinker holds that geography shapes ideologies, cultures and religions. Civilizations of the plains, steppes or deserts, for example, which are conducive to expansion and conquest, differ from civilizations of the mountains and forests, which are more inclined to preserve the traditions of the people. Dugin also defends the relevance of the traditional opposition thalassocracy-tellurocracy, used to qualify two distinct types of powers. There are those who dominate by the mastery of the sea and those who dominate by the mastery of the land; and it is understood that these modes of domination are not be insignificant on the ideological level.

According to Dugin, tellurocracy embodies stability, gravity, fixity and politics, while thalassocracy promotes mobility, fluidity, dynamics and economy. While the terrestrial empires, often military, are tellurocratic in form, the colonial empires, more commercial, are more thalassocratic. However, the geopolitician notes that this typology does not boil down to a simple water/land opposition and to a strict geographical determinism. There are maritime lands (islands) and terrestrial waters (rivers and inland seas). Similarly, Dugin notes that Japanese geopolitics is tellurocratic, despite its insular character; while he sees in the power of the North American continent a thalassocracy that relies on the dynamism of its maritime and commercial interfaces. Applying this reading grid, the Russian thinker considers that Eurasia, a land continent going from Europe to Asia and whose center of gravity is located in Russia, constitutes the tellurocratic model opposed to the Atlanticist United States of America.

## **Sacred Geography and Religions**

Going beyond the strict framework of geography, this dualism is also found within religious systems. The values of the land transposed to the religious is manifested by depth, tradition, contemplation and mysticism. The Atlanticist principle, on the other hand, is more superficial and materialistic, giving primacy to ritual, to the organization of daily life, and even going so far as to ignore the divine part in man. Thus, Dugin sees Orthodoxy as the earthly aspect of Christianity, while Catholicism and Protestantism constitute its Atlanticist face. Similarly, within Islam, the earthly principle is found more in certain branches of Shi'ism and in Sufism. On the contrary, Salafism and Wahhabism would be more Atlanticist in their emphasis on ritual and their religious dogmatism, which seeks to eradicate the traditional spiritualities of the converted peoples. Faced with American Protestantism and Saudi Salafism, whose geopolitical alliances, since 1945, Dugin points out, the Russian world brings together, on the contrary, religions of a telluric type with Russian Orthodoxy but also Caucasian and Central Asian Islam.

As for Judaism, not only does it not escape this internal opposition, but it is also found in the secular forms of Jewish thought. Dugin analyzes the mystical branches of Judaism (Hasidism, Sabbataism, Kabbalism) as the expression of the earthly aspect of this religion. Talmudism, on the other hand, represents the Atlanticist aspect of the religion, particularly through its emphasis on dogmatic rigor and rationalism. Moreover, recalling the influence of Jewish messianism on the development of Marxism and Bolshevism, Dugin sees the latter as secular forms of earthly Judaism. On the contrary, secularized Atlanticist Judaism contributed to the rise of capitalism and the bourgeois spirit. The Russian geopolitician sees in this internal tension within Judaism the explanation of a recurrent "Jewish anti-Semitism." Karl Marx's statement that money is the profane God of Judaism (*The Jewish Question*) is the empirical embodiment of the mystical Jew attacking the Talmudic Jew, an emanation of tradition against a form of modernity.

The opposition between Eurasianism and Atlanticism does not summarize the vision of sacred geography according to Alexander Dugin, but it is an actualization of the eternal struggle between tellurocracy and thalassocracy, as well as the underlying basis of the war between tradition and modernity. He also relies on the East-West and North-South dualisms. For the champion of Eurasism, the East embodies archaism, tradition and the primacy of the supra-individual over the individual. The West represents on the contrary material progress, modernity and individualism. Faithful to the geographical representations of numerous traditions (biblical, Egyptian, Iranian or Chinese), this opposition is also corroborated by the frequent contemporary representations of the "Western world" and the East. However, in sacred geography, it is the Eastern values that are superior to the Western values. The exact opposite can be observed in modern geopolitics, for which Western values of liberal

democracy and individualistic human rights, associated with a strict market economy, are set up as a model.

## **The Tradition of the North**

In the eyes of Dugin, the East-West duality is however only a late horizontal transposition of the primordial geographical duality opposing the North to the South. Divine land par excellence, the North is the land of the spirit and of being. If he refuses the idea of a purely objective North, which would designate only a geographical pole, the Russian philosopher however rejects the definition of a North reduced to an idea. Certainly, the primordial tradition came from the geographical North; but that era is over. The man of the North, almost divine, has disappeared today as such but is still be present in a diffuse way and in variable proportions within all the peoples. The same is true of the man from the South, who embodies the tendency towards materialism and idolatry. If the man of the South venerates the cosmos, often in the form of Mother Earth, he apprehends it only by his instinct and shows himself incapable of grasping its spiritual part. These two types of man are no longer opposed to each other today, but within peoples and civilizations. In no way can this opposition be compared to a Manichean combat of good against evil. The North and the South are complementary; the former embodied in the latter. Nevertheless, Dugin believes that respect for the divine order requires the superiority of the spiritual principle of the North over the material principle of the South.

Although the opposition between the North and the South takes precedence over that between the East and the West, the Russian strategist notes that the first duality takes on a different coloring according to the geographical transpositions that take place. Various combinations can be formed by the spirituality of the North, the materialism of the South, the holism of the East and the individualism of the West. Dugin thus establishes that the sacred values of the North are sterilely preserved by the South, enhanced by the East and fragmented by the West. As for the values of the South, according to their milieu of immersion, they opacify the spirit of the North, transform Eastern holism into a pure negation of the individual, and generate an individualistic materialism in the West. It is under this last form that Western modernity appears in the eyes of the Eurasist philosopher. Fruit of the most negative combination of sacred geography, the supposed success of Western countries, however essentially located in the geographical north, advocates values opposed to tradition. This inversion of the poles constitutes a characteristic of the dark age, or Kali Yuga, in which the world now finds itself.

Nevertheless, Alexander Dugin does not consider that salvation must come from the South. Sterile by

essence, the latter would only be able to preserve fragments of northern tradition that the Russian mystic perceives in the Islamic world, in Hindu India, and even in China, despite its partial conversion to modernity. Salvation comes from the alliance between this conservative South and the islands of authentic tradition still present in the North, and particularly in the Northeast. Dugin thus locates in the Russian world the current heart of tradition and the struggle against modernity. The Russian world, including Russia but also its various peripheries, brings together geographical qualities (located in the North-East in the sense of sacred geography), religious qualities (Orthodoxy, Eurasian Islam, Russian Judaism) and the characteristics of a telluric power which allow it to play a decisive role in the struggle against Atlanticist, Western modernity and its opposition to the spirit of the North.

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*[Featured image](#): "Vyaselka," (Rainbow), by Nikolay Dubovskoy; painted in 1892.*

