

## Vladimir Konstantinovich Volkov, 1930–2005

Vladimir Konstantinovich Volkov died in Moscow on 6 November 2005 at the age of seventy-five. He was in the process of planning another visit to the United States; in fact, shortly before his untimely death, I spoke to him on the phone about arranging a lecture at Stanford University. The long-term director of the Institut Slavianovedeniia (Institute of Slavic Studies) of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow and a corresponding member of the academy, Volkov was a well-known historian of southeastern Europe, especially of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria in the twentieth century.

Volkov's career was not untypical of many Soviet scholars. Born in Voronezh on 15 December 1930, he was evacuated to the east with his father, a railway official, and his mother, a music teacher, during the Nazi assault. The family returned to Moscow in 1943, where the young Volkov studied in secondary school, earned a gold medal upon graduation, and entered the history faculty of Moscow State University (MGU) in 1949. After 1917, the Soviet leadership looked askance at Slavic studies, which was thought to be the refuge of reactionaries and nationalists. Many of the scholars associated with the field had emigrated after the revolution or been repressed in the 1930s. But with the growing threat of Adolf Hitler's aggression and the Soviets' need to make common cause with their Slavic cousins to the west, MGU's history faculty opened a department of the South Slavs and West Slavs in 1939. Ten years later, Volkov was to study in this department. By the time Volkov graduated from MGU in 1954, he knew Bulgarian and Serbian (as well as German and English) and could be considered a specialist on the modern history of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. Of course, this was the period of Stalin's death, de-Stalinization, and the hopeful reconciliation with Yugoslavia.

After graduating from the university, Volkov was assigned to the Main Radio Administration, where he worked as an editor for Yugoslav and Bulgarian broadcasting. He perfected his Serbian and learned a great deal about the complicated dynamics of Moscow's policies toward Yugoslavia. This knowledge served him well when he was admitted to the Institute of Slavic Studies in 1956 as a junior scientific associate. The Soviet wartime interest in Slavic studies had led to the founding of the institute, which was officially opened as part of the Academy of Sciences on 1 January 1947, with Academician B. D. Grekov, the famous Russian medievalist, as its first director. This occurred at the same time as the fleeting influence of the so-called Slavic Committee, formed during the war by the Central Committee of the CPSU(b), which promoted the fashionable ideas of Slavic brotherhood that were also articulated in Moscow's postwar campaign to win friends in the newly formed "People's Democracies." Interestingly, American universities in this period, first Harvard, and then Columbia, also established the first interdisciplinary Slavic studies institutes in the United States.

Volkov worked for the rest of his life in the Institute of Slavic Studies, first in its section on recent history, then in the section on the history of the socialist countries, and finally in the section on Slavic-German relations. As a protégé and friend of E. A. Korol'chuk, one of the founding members of the institute, he completed his *kandidat* dissertation in 1963 on German-Slavic relations and the failure of the Little Entente, publishing it in condensed form as *Germano-iugoslavskie otnosheniia i razval Maloi Antanty, 1933–1938 gg.* (1966). During the 1960s and 1970s, the German threat to the Slavic east was heavily emphasized in Moscow's foreign policy, and Volkov responded with a number of monographic and edited studies focusing on the German "Drang nach Osten." Even though he echoed some of the political rhetoric of the day, Volkov was a thorough and assiduous scholar, deeply immersed in the historiography of the countries he studied and an expert on German policy in southeastern Europe, in particular. As genuine defenders of Slavic friendship, the institute and its coworkers were badly shaken by Moscow's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. The Czechs had been considered especially close brothers of the Russians. Quiet protests by some of the institute's scholars, Volkov included, led to considerable mistrust from the party hierarchy.

The institute weathered this difficult period by adjusting to the Kremlin's need for increased expertise on the Balkans, including Albania, Greece, and Romania, and these countries' relations with the Middle East. In fact, as a way of underlining this new emphasis, the institute was renamed the Institute of Slavic and Balkan Studies in 1968. Volkov was clearly an important figure in this transformation and, in 1970, he became head of the section on the international relations of central and southeastern Europe. In 1979, he was awarded his doctoral degree based on his thorough study of the Munich Agreement and the Balkans; this appeared as *Miunkhenskii sgovor i balkanskie strany* (1978) and was also translated into Serbo-Croatian and Czech. His many publications in this period focused on the diplomatic history of Germany and southeastern Europe in the interwar period. He gave lecture courses at MGU and at Voronezh University, becoming the mentor for a number of graduate students in Slavic studies, some of whom later joined the institute.

Like many other Soviet scholars, Volkov was severely challenged by the changes in the Soviet Union during the Gorbachev period. Unlike some of his colleagues, however, he was able to change with the times and respected the right of scholars to respond to society's demand for more open and honest evaluations of the past. In 1987, during the first genuine elections for the leadership of an academy institute, his colleagues selected him to be director of the institute. At the same time, he watched with horror, as did many Yugoslav experts in the institute, as Yugoslavia not only shed its socialist system but erupted in violence. In the early 1990s, he developed his own theories about the baneful development of "ethnocracies" in postcommunist societies. He was critical of the west's interference in Yugoslav affairs and remained, to the end, an advocate of Russian influence in the Balkans and a defender of Russian support for Belgrade. Meanwhile, under the El'tsin regime, he became an important academic politician and was able to pursue his studies of Hitler's foreign policy in southeastern Europe in the Presidential Archives. He continued to publish and began to travel and speak widely in the west, including several visits to Stanford University.

Volkov guided the Institute of Slavic Studies (now returned to its original name) through difficult times with guile and determination, and he was fiercely loyal to the institution, to its co-workers, and to its mission of promoting Russian scholarship about the Slavs. During his lifetime, he published more than 150 titles. He leaves behind him a grateful and appreciative community of scholars in Slavic studies.

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I owe much of the information about Volkov's career to a thorough academic biography by B. V. Nosov: "Vladimir Konstantinovich Volkov—tvorcheskii put' uchenogo," in B. V. Nosov, ed., *Slavianskie narody: Obshchnost' istorii i kul'tury: K 70-letiiu chlenakorrespondenta Rossiiskoi akademii nauk Vladimira Konstantinovicha Volkova* (Moscow, 2000), 7–23. The volume also contains a bibliography of Volkov's work (476–85).