

Mariusz Gołębek

Russians according to Lev Gumilev

Abstract: Lev Gumilev (1912–1992) was the son of the famous poets Anna Akhmatova and Nikolai Gumilev. Nikolai was executed by the Bolsheviks in 1921. As a child of an “enemy of the people,” Lev Gumilev was removed from the University of Leningrad and four times imprisoned or sent to Soviet concentration camps (1935–1956). After the XX Congress of the CPSU, Gumilev continued his academic career as a notable historian, geographer and ethnologist. His ideas qualify him as a leading Neo-Eurasianist. He believed that the Russians should be proud of the Tatar-Mongol heritage of their country. According to him, the “Tatar yoke” of Rus’ of the Middle Ages was nothing but an alliance against the influence of the West. Gumilev’s main achievement was rectification of “the black legend” surrounding the Hun, ancient Turk and Mongol civilizations.

Key words: Neo-Eurasianism, Tatar-Mongol heritage, civilizational backwardness

Introduction

Lev Nikolayevich Gumilev died in 1992 as a Russian citizen, who won acclaim in his homeland. However, the son of Anna Akhmatova had a difficult life, as evidenced by his long-time stay in Stalin’s camps. The Soviet security service turned its attention to an innocent man, whose mother, a famous poet, was persecuted by the National Writers Association, and whose father (also a writer) was executed by the Bolsheviks in 1921 because of his alleged involvement in a plot. It was not until the 1980s and 90s that Gumilev’s political ideology experienced a true renaissance. This occurred the moment Russians began to look for their own way in the world as a result of the fall of Communism, which had kept the Soviet Union together. For this reason, elites began

to revive their Eurasian orientation. In this sense, Lev Gumilev proved to be somewhat of an oracle.

Understanding the Tatar invasion of Rus' in the thirteenth century is very important for our further considerations. Looking into the depths of the Middle Ages allows for a better understanding of the origins of the comparison of Russia (the Tsar, Soviet Union or present-day Russia) to "bloodthirsty Mongolian hordes." The word "horde" is meant to be an insulting term presenting our Eastern neighbour as a backward nomadic society. Some people do perceive the term as an insult, which is particularly true for those Russians who would like to see their homeland as a part of Europe, or, in broader terms, as a part of the West.¹ Meanwhile, not only did Gumilev not care much about this comparison, he even went on to urge his fellow citizens to be proud of their Tatar heritage, which, according to Gumilev, was an inseparable part of their history. This prominent historian and ethnographer attempted to change the negative perception of the nomadic peoples of the Great Steppe as primitive and barbaric tribes.

Before going any further, however, it is important to provide some more insight into the location of the great Steppe, and into what Gumilev's key concepts of ethnos and super-ethnos are. As far as the Great Steppe is concerned, opinions are divided. The broadest of the definitions, akin to those of Gumilev, seems to be the closest to the truth. According to the definition, the Great Steppe is understood as the area of land between the Ussuri River to the East and the Danube to the West. This is the heart of the Eurasian continent. To the North, the Great Steppe forms a boundary with the Siberian taiga, and to the South with high mountain chains. In addition, the land is divided into two dissimilar parts. To the East there lies Mongolia, Dzungaria and East Turkistan. It is separated from Siberia by the Sayan, Chamar Daban and the Yablonoj Mountains, from China by the Great Wall, and from Tibet by Kunlin and Nanshan. In turn, the western part of the Great Steppe is dominated by Kazakhstan, the Black Sea Steppe and in certain periods of history, also by the Pannonian Steppe. The East and West of this enormous region is divided by the Altai, Saur and Western Tien-Shan mountains.² The area being described

¹ In the first half of the 1990s, the Russia of Boris Yeltsin seemed to aspire to "membership" in the Western world. It is an indisputable fact that the orientation of the "zapadnikovs" then had more to say than in the era of Vladimir Putin's rule. It is worth noting, however, that already then (during the slow expiration of Russia's fascination with Europe) Ryszard Paradowski in several concise words concluded the pointlessness of this policy, noting that a simple glance at the map is enough to see that putting something so large into something so little (Russia into Europe) is irrational. One finds it difficult to disagree with him. R. Paradowski: *Idea Rosji-Eurazji i naukowy nacjonalizm Lwa Gumilowa*. Warszawa 1996, p. 5.

² See. L.N. Gumilev: *Erdieji J., Jedinstwo i raznoobrazazije stiepnój kultury Jewrazji w sriednijej wieku*. W: *Narody Azji i Afryki*. 1969, p. 78–87, and Idem: *Rol klimatycznych kolebanij w istorii narodow stiepnój zony Jewrazji*. „*Istorija SSSR*” 1967, № 1, p. 53–66. As cited in: L.N. Gumilow: *Dzieje etnosów wielkiego stepu*. Trans. A. Nowak. Kraków 1997, pp. 11–12.

is millions of square kilometres large, where civilisations, linking the East and West formed, grew and died.

The regions of Eurasia and the Great Steppe have been extensively used in various studies done by scholars of different scientific disciplines. However, in order to define the concepts of ethnos and super-ethnos, one needs to reach directly to the works of Lev Gumilev. This is how the Petersburgian describes the concept of ethnos: “Speaking of ethnos, we think of a group of people, which is different than all other similar groups; the group is guided not by selfishness but by the principle of complementarity – i.e. a subconscious feeling of mutual sympathy and a sense of community of the people, defining the ‘us’ and ‘them’ contrast, as well as the ‘friend’ and ‘foe’ division.³ A similar, though clearer, definition of ethnos is found in “the dictionary of selected terms” contained in the work entitled *Od Rusi do Rosji (From Rus to Russia)*: “A society, shaped on the basis of an original stereotype of behaviours, functioning as a system, which pits itself against other similar systems according to the principle of complementarity.”⁴ Ethnos, on the other hand, the definition of which is intriguing due to its way of referring to Russians, is described as follows according to the same “dictionary”: “An ethnic system composed of several ethnoses, formed in one climatic region and in identical natural conditions and which appears in history as a complex mosaic entirety.”⁵

This paper is composed of four parts. The first one deals with the person of Lev Gumilev himself, whose past has not yet been fully discovered, but which has largely defined his views and opinions. The second part talks about the “myth of the wild nomadic tribes,” which Gumilev tried to abolish. Clearing the people of Central Asia of being perceived as primitive barbarians serves a few purposes. One of them is historical truth, which tended to be misinterpreted due to the Eurocentric and Sinocentric orientation of researchers. Another objective is related to Tatar (Mongol) heritage, which, according to Gumilev, Russia took over. It is, after all, better to be proud of an advanced civilisation than a destruction-wreaking horde. The third part of the paper deals with the Russian and Mongolian relations in the Middle Ages. This part ultimately resolved with the development of the new Russian super-ethnos, whose composition and origins are described in part four. Both of the last parts of the paper present Lev Gumilev’s peculiar and fascinating opinions, which make it difficult to classify this philosopher as a far-right Russian nationalist.

³ L.N. Gumilow: *Od Rusi do Rosji*. Trans. E. Rojewska-Olejarczuk. Warszawa 2004, p. 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

Lev Nikolayevich Gumilev

Lev Gumilev is not a known figure in Poland. Four of his works have been translated into Polish: *Od Rusi do Rosji*, *Dzieje dawnych Turków*, *Śladami cywilizacji Wielkiego Stepu* oraz *Dzieje etnosów wielkiego stepu*. Therefore those interested in the history of Russia and Central Asia will most probably be the first to be familiar with the philosopher's and historian's works. Another way to gain insight into Lev Gumilev's work is through studying the story of his famous parents: Nikolai Gumilev and Anna Akhmatova.

Lev Gumilev was born on 1 October 1912 in Tsarskoye Selo,⁶ located about 25 km from the centre of Saint Petersburg, where he spent most of his adult life. He had no siblings, though his mother was married three times and had many admirers. She came from Odessa and her real name was Anna Gorienko. The nickname, under which the world came to know her, was adopted by Anna from a Tatar princess, an ancestor of hers.⁷ Anna and Nikolai did not live up to their roles as parents and continued their carefree life. Nikolai's mother took Lev under her wing, and they both lived in her hometown of Bezhetsk in the years 1917–1929. After WWI broke out, Nikolai was sent to the front. In 1918, Akhmatova and Gumilev got divorced. Half a year later she married Vladimir Szylejka, but this marriage lasted only a few years.

On 3 August 1921, Nikolai Gumilev was arrested on charges of supporting anti-Bolshevik activity, namely for his participation in the so-called Vladimir Tagantsev conspiracy. Despite torture, he did not reveal any of the conspirator's names and was shot on 25 August. Maxim Gorki stepped in to set Nikolai free and managed to obtain an order for his release. However, he failed to deliver the order in time and so Nikolai was shot. The death of his father came as a huge blow to Lev and haunted him for the rest of his life, for Lev was from now on "an enemy of the revolution."

In 1930, the eighteen-year-old Lev Gumilev moved from Bizetsk to Lenin-grad to live with his mother in the home of her third husband Nikolai Punin, whom Gumilev was not too fond of. Punin was not enthused about the teenager either. With the help of his brother Alexander, Lev enrolled in a local school and chose to study the history of Central Asia. He was also angry at his mother that she had not shown any greater interest in him.⁸

In the early 1930s, Lev came to share his life with Emma Gerstein. She was a friend of Osip Mandelstam's family and was 9 years his senior. Throughout

⁶ Now called "Puszkín" to commemorate Alexander Puszkín. It is located within the perimeter of the city of Saint Petersburg.

⁷ E. Feinstein: *Anna Wszzechrosji*. Przeł. K. Bażyńska-Chojnacka, P. Chojnacki, M. Antosiewicz. Londyn 2005, p. 9.

⁸ S. Ławrow: *Sudba i idei*. Moskwa 2003, p. 9. As cited in: E. Feinstein: *Anna...*, p. 117.

her life she had expressed her admiration for the poetry of Anna Akhmatova, which did not go unnoticed in her admiration of Lev. In 1933, Gumilev became a student at the Faculty of History at Leningrad University. Earlier, he had taken part in expeditions to the Pamir and Sayan mountains as well as to Crimea. A few years later, in an conversation with Emma Gerstein, Akhmatova remarked that her son “madly and passionately longed to live in Mongolia.”⁹ In these hard times it happened that the young Gumilev failed his exams as he had frequently lost his consciousness due to undernourishment.

After enrolling at University, Gumilev was arrested for the first time in his life. He had spent nine days in prison before being released. In the following years, he frequently visited the home of Osip Mandelstam, often being the first listener of his works. The poet was soon after arrested, and as a result of forced testimony, Lev was detained. In the fall of 1935, the son of Akhmatova was arrested together with Nikolai Punin. The writer decided to send a letter to Joseph Stalin, in which she expressed her long-standing attachment to the Soviet Union and asked for the release of her husband and son. Boris Pasternak also pleaded for them to be set free. The dictator succumbed to their pleas and briefly noted down the following order on Akhmatova’s letter: “To comrade Jagoda [Gienrich, People’s Commissioner for Internal Affairs, the NKVD – M.G.]. Release Punin and Gumilev from custody and provide feedback if the order was executed. Stalin.”¹⁰

The twenty-year-old was given back his freedom but at the price of expulsion from university. He had no job and often had to go about without any food. In this situation, he decided to move to Moscow and hoped to be accepted at a local university. Finally, in 1937, he was allowed to return to Leningrad University thanks to the help of Mikhail Lasorkin. However, the professor was quickly arrested and murdered, leaving Gumilev without his patron. A year later he was imprisoned for the third time because he had argued with a professor of contemporary Russian literature, who had ridiculed Nikolai. Lev protested against the lies and slanders of the lecturer, who had afterwards complained to the university’s administration about the unacceptable behaviour of the undisciplined student. This was enough for the NKVD to respond, and on 10 March 1938, the young Gumilev was thrown into prison, where this time he was tortured. He was sentenced to 10 years hard labour and was deprived of his public rights for a period of 4 years. He was first sent to the taiga to fell trees and then to build the Belomor Canal.

⁹ E. Gerstein: *Moscow Memoirs*. London 2004, p. 56. As cited in: E. Feinstein: *Anna...*, p. 123.

¹⁰ L.N. Gumilow: *Awtobiografija. Wospominanija o roditielach* [a transcription of a cassette recording from September 1986]. As cited in: S. Ławrow: *Sudba...*, p. 65. As cited in: E. Feinstein: *Anna...*, p. 134.

Akhmatova was unable to reconcile with the imprisonment of her son, which she expressed in numerous poems¹¹ and sought his pardon in vain. After the Great Purge, she hoped to succeed. However, the death of Osip Mandelstam in a camp in the Far East in 1939, convinced her that little had changed. In the same year, the original sentence Lev received was put under review and replaced instead with execution by firing squad. He was transported to the Kresty prison in Leningrad. Gumilev believed that this was what, paradoxically, saved his life, as by then he was on the verge of collapse.¹² Lev was interrogated and in addition was charged with the intended murder of Andrei Zdanov, the Chairman of the ICP (b) in Leningrad. Instead, he received a sentence of “only” five years of labour in Norilsk. There, ironically, he was better treated than in Leningrad.

In the camp, inmates could perfect their skills. Initially Lev worked in a copper mine, and after qualifying as a geological technician, he was involved in mineral exploration. Just how difficult life in the far North really was is best expressed by Lev himself, who said that compared to Norilsk, the front of WWII he fought on was more of a holiday than a war.¹³ In his letters to Emma Gerstein, he often complained that his mother had lost interest in his fate, which was not true. The guards falsely told him that he could be easily set free if only Akhmatova requested this. Despite her multiple attempts, even after regaining her right to publish her works and after being accepted to the USSR Association of Writers, she was not successful in helping her son. After the German assault on the Soviet Union followed by the siege of Leningrad, Soviet authorities decided to evacuate the most famous poets and artists from the city. Thus in the autumn of 1941, Anna Akhmatova was relocated to Czestopol in Tatarstan, from where she moved to Tashkent in November. For more than a year she heard no news from her son. The first letter from him arrived on January 4, 1943. In it Lev assured his mother of his good health.¹⁴ In March he finished his sentence, but had to remain in Norilsk as he was forbidden to leave the city. He began work as a member of an expedition searching for metal deposits. As a reward for his

¹¹ Anna Akhmatova dedicated many verses of her poems to her son, in spite of their cold relationship. “Seventeen months I cry, call you home, fell down at butcher’s feet, you are my son and horror of mine.” A. Achmatowa: *Wiersze*, p. 289, transl. by S. Pollak. Warszawa 1989. As cited in: E. Feinstein: *Anna...*, p. 151.

¹² “This time I have been saved not by Stalin, but as it sometimes happens, by mere coincidence. In 1939, I was almost dead [here he used the prison term *dokodayga*, which means a [...] ‘Muslim’ in a concentration camp – M.G.] [...] Standing by one spruce tree, which I almost felled, my axe fell out of my faint hands. Luckily enough I sharpened it the previous evening. The axe easily broke through the thick leather of my shoe and cut my foot almost to the bone. The wound got infected and this probably would have been my end [...], but fate decided otherwise. I was summoned to Leningrad for a new hearing. This saved my life.” L.N. Gumilow: *Awtobiografija...* As cited in: S. Ławrow: *Sudba...*, p. 70.

¹³ E. Feinstein: *Anna...*, p. 150.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

successes, he received the opportunity to stay for two weeks in Turuchansk.¹⁵ There he turned to a local police chief and requested to be drafted into the Red Army. He was sent to the front and saw it as a significant improvement of his fate, mainly because he did not have to worry about being hungry any more. He was a gunner in the First Belorussian Front. Lev participated in the capture of Berlin, where he spent nearly half a year after the fighting had ended. He saw this time as the happiest period in his life. In November 1945, he returned to the city on the Neva River and again moved in with his mother to the home of Nikolai Punin. He graduated from the Department of History at the Leningrad University with honours. During this time, Anna Akhmatova met Isaiah Berlin, who came to the Soviet Union as an envoy of the government of Great Britain, and befriended him. The thirty-year-old Lev Gumilev often accompanied the two. Berlin very much enjoyed conversing with Akhmatova's son. The English philosopher was amazed how well-read Lev was, a man who had spent much of his life in camps and at war.¹⁶

The visits of the foreign guest did not go unnoticed by the NKVD. Stalin read a report on the subject and stated: "[...] our sister invited foreign spies to her home."¹⁷ Akhmatova's work was sharply criticised by Andrei Zhdanov, which was a sign of a new wave of repression against the aging and sick poet. The repressions did not save her son either. In April 1946, Gumilev took on doctoral studies at the Academy of Sciences. However, several months later, he was forbidden from entering the University. In 1947, he was removed from the list of students, but was allowed to defend his doctoral dissertation entitled *Подробная история тюркского каганата политическая первого* (*A detailed political history of the first Turkish Khaganate*) and was given the degree of candidate of historical Sciences (equivalent to PhD). Akhmatova did not appear at his defence as she feared her presence would do her son more harm than good.

Gumilev then went on to become an employee of the Ethnographic Museum. His work there, however, was short lived as he was again arrested on November 6, 1949. He was transported to the prison in Lefortovo, and then to a camp in Omsk. In September 1950, he received a sentence of ten years in a Lagr camp with a limited right to exchange correspondence. He served his sentence in the camps located in Tsurbay-Nur, near Karaganda and in Mezhdurechensk (Kuznetsk Basin). Akhmatova, who took her son's arrest quite hard, thought she could help him by writing a poem glorifying Stalin. This is how the series of poems entitled *Long live peace* saw the light of day, but the dictator could not

¹⁵ Turuchansk was a small but well-known Siberian town. The location earned its fame from the fact that Joseph Stalin was sent in exile to Turuchansk during Tsar rule.

¹⁶ M. Ignatieff: *Isaiah Berlin. A life*. New York 1998, p. 161, As cited in: E. Feinstein: *Anna...*, p. 193.

¹⁷ G. Dalos: *The Guest from the Future: Anna Akhmatova and Isaiah Berlin*. New York 2000, p. 66. As cited in: E. Feinstein: *Anna...*, p. 196.

care less. Mikhail Sholokhov and Ilya Ehrenburg also sent letters in defence of Gumilev, but to no avail. Camps did not deter Gumilev from further studying the history of Central Asia. In the correspondence between him and Akhmatova, there was an item included in which she clarified the ethnic origin of one of the authors, whose works Gumilev was reading. She explained that the author belonged to an old Turkish tribe of Khitan people and not as Lev had previously thought, the Huns.¹⁸ Roman Backer once wrote: “Sobolev’s account that (1991, p. 180) Sawicki [Piotr, a prominent representative of Euroasianism – M.G.] met the famous poet Lev Gumilev, son of Anna Akhmatova, can be considered a myth. Lev’s educational experiences in the camp, which he still wrote about in Aesopian language in 1989, describing it as his first course in academic history [...], were born to life thanks to a clandestine university that had functioned in the camp, which was made up of different political prisoners there detained. But Sawicki had already contacted Gumilev then through different people.”¹⁹ A different conclusion is proposed by Andrzej Nowak: “It was there, thanks to his meditations in the camp barracks, where the ethnological mysticism was born in the mind of Lev (visible especially in situations where the role of art came to play) including the concept of overpowering ethnical upheaval – the human desire to live at any cost and in spite of the surrounding conditions.”²⁰

Akhmatova still sought to free her son. She once established contact with Marshal Kliment Woroshilov, but achieved nothing. After Stalin’s death, the situation did not change much. Gumilev was convinced that his mother did not care about his fate. In a letter to Emma Gerstein he wrote: “If I was not her son [...] I would have become an outstanding Soviet professor, a non-partisan specialist. Mom knows [...] that the only reason for my trouble is my relationship with her.”²¹ In 1954, Lev was qualified as a disabled person, which freed him from having to perform any physical work. This gave him more time to do his research and read, which Akhmatova helped him in by sending books. At the 20th Congress of the Communist Party, after the Secret Speech of Nikita Khrushchev “On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences,” Lev Gumilev’s trial was resumed. He was freed of charges on May 15, 1956 and “returned home with two suitcases containing mostly books and almost no clothes.”²²

Akhmatova was joyful of his release, but the relations between them remained sour until the end. Iosif Brodsky recalled: “In the last years before Akhmatova’s death, they did not see each other at all.”²³ It was not completely

¹⁸ E. Feinstein: *Anna...*, p. 203.

¹⁹ R. Backer: *Dzieje Eurazjyzmu*. W: *Między Europą a Azją. Idea Rosji – Eurazji*. Red. S. Grzybowski. Toruń 1998, p. 45.

²⁰ L.N. Gumilow: *Dzieje etnosów...*, p. 104 (epilogue A. Nowak).

²¹ E. Gerstein: *Moscow Memoirs...*, p. 456. As cited in: E. Feinstein: *Anna...*, p. 206.

²² E. Feinstein: *Anna...*, p. 208.

²³ S. Volkov: *Conversation with Joseph Brodsky*. Nowy York–London 1998, p. 237. As

true, but is indicative of how their relationship was perceived by their friends.²⁴ At the end of her life, Akhmatova found recognition at home and abroad. She received the Etna Taormin Literary Award and an honorary doctorate of the University of Oxford, to which Isaiah Berlin contributed. The Soviet Literary Foundation granted her a modest cottage in Komarov, where she welcomed many famous guests. Her poems were printed and she could embark upon the translation of foreign works in peace and silence. The extra money this activity brought her allowed her to help out her fifty-year-old son, who due to several years spent in camps, had only just started fending for himself. This contradicts what Brodsky said that their ties were completely severed. Despite the problems she had with walking, she even found the strength to visit a lawyer to validate her will making her son her only inheritor.

After his release, Lev Gumilev was made curator at the State Hermitage Museum, and in 1961, he received the degree of doctor of science (the equivalent of a habilitation) for his work entitled *Древние тюрки 6–8 вв. (Ancient Turks VI-VIII)*. Then, too, he published his first book (*Хунну*, written in 1960), in which he tried to take account of the positive role of the Huns and the Genghis Khan Empire in the history of Asia. It was sharply criticized. Many people did not agree with the views of Gumilev concerning the indigenous peoples of the Central Asian Steppe. Recognized employees of the Hermitage stood up in its defence. Among them was its director, Mikhail Artamonov.²⁵ Gumilev participated in several other research expeditions in the Volga delta and in the North Caucasus. In 1963, he became a researcher at the Research Institute of the Leningrad University. In November 1965, Anna Akhmatova suffered another heart attack. She spent three months in hospital. Her son once tried to visit her but could not make it. She died on 5 March 1966 in the elite hospital in Domodedovo. Five years later she was buried in Komarov. When Gumilev found out about his mother's death, he said: "I wish it was me that died, not my mother."²⁶

cited in: E. Feinstein: *Anna...*, p. 221.

²⁴ E. Feinstein points to one more issue, which could have caused conflict between Akhmatova and Gumilev: "The views of Lev and his mother differed radically. Akhmatova was clearly philo-Semitic. Many of her beloved ones (Modigliani, Lurie and later Berlin) were Jewish, whereas Lev had reactionary views, akin to the right-wing 'black hundreds' working for the Tsarist regime. Many people spoke about his anti-Semitism. He believed that only fascist Russia can lead to the creation of a prosperous state in which, as he explained to Emma Gerstein, who was Jewish, "Jewish descendants would not be allowed to do anything and as in the case of Mulattos and Mestizos, they would not be treated as members of the public [...]. This reluctance was partly related to his subsequent experiences in the camp, where he received poor treatment from Jewish investigators. However, his beliefs formed long before imprisonment." E. Gerstein: *Moscow Memoirs...*, p. 230. As cited in: E. Feinstein: *Anna...*, pp. 139–140.

²⁵ E. Feinstein: *Anna...*, p. 239.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

That very same year, Lev Gumilev received permission for his first trip abroad (not counting the times he was abroad when fighting battles at the front of World War II). He went to Prague to an ethnographic Congress and there he met Piotr Sawicki.²⁷ There, he also wrote a work in which he addressed the problem of Khazaria. The paper was entitled *Открытие Хазарии* (*The Discovery of Khazaria*).²⁸ There he also met his future wife, Natalia Viktorovna, whom he married in 1967. That very same year Lev Gumilev saw the publishing of his book entitled *Древние тюрки* (*Ancient Turks*), which became widely known and was translated into many languages. Three years later, the book *Поиски вымышленного царства*, known in English under the title *Searches for an Imaginary Kingdom*, was published. In the 1970s, Gumilev wrote more than forty articles and works (among others *Хунны в Китае – The Huns in China*). In 1974 he received the degree of Doctor of Geographical Sciences (habilitation) for his work entitled *Этногенез и биосфера Земли* (*Ethnogenesis and the Biosphere of Earth*) which was published five years later. He defined the concept of the ethnos and superethnos. This is how Richard Paradowski summarised his attempt at defining both concepts: “The interdisciplinary approach employed by Gumilev with regard to this subject and the use of the systemic approach which was popular then in the USSR, resulted in the initial definition of the ethnos, which, despite all the scientific staffage, in a very transparent manner justifies the old Russian idea of the need to protect the identity (Rus. *самобытности*) of the Russian people against negative influences.”²⁹ He created an original theory of ethnogenesis based on the role and level of passionarity (the excess of the biochemical energy of a living substance, expressed in terms of the human capacity to endure excessive effort³⁰). He distinguished different ethnogeneses relating to the individual stages of development of a given ethnos and to different levels of passionarity. His thoughts were termed by Paradowski as “scientific nationalism.”

His views were still sharply criticised, which Andrzej Nowak makes account of: “Gumilev’s theories did not fit well with the Soviet vision of ethnic homog-

²⁷ Ibid., p. 250. Roman Backer claims this happened in 1960. R. Backer: *Dzieje Eurazjatyizmu*. In *Między Europą a Azją...*, p. 45.

²⁸ In Gumilev’s works, Khazaria became a symbol of the Jewish threat to Rus and Russia. Richard Paradowski wrote what follows in one of his later works: “Alongside the 19 cases where the term ‘Khazaria’ appeared, the term ‘Judaic’ was used eight times, whereas the word ‘Jewish’ about twice. The fact that this term is not common and has been used only to bring the ethnic substrate of the Khazar nation (one of its ethnic substrates) closer to the reader, is the use of terms which by no measure can be considered neutral. One of them is the term ‘military and trade octopus of Khazaria’ which sells the goods of Russia and the lives of its soldiers.” R. Paradowski: *Metafizyka ksenofobii i teoria antyetynosów Lwa Gumilowa*. In: *Między Europą a Azją...*, p. 79.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 83.

³⁰ L.N. Gumilow: *Od Rusi...*, p. 278.

enisation and *Gleichachtung* of traditions. As a result, Gumilev was criticised for ‘behaviorism’, ‘biologizm’ and an ‘anti-Marxist’ point of view.³¹ In turn, Richard Paradowski wrote that Gumilev was almost never conflicted with Marxism: “Lev Gumilev was generally careful in his statements about Marxism, to the extent that he was able to express disapproval for something for its inconsistency with Marxist ideology. His views, however, diverged with Marxism for he treated ethnos studies as a natural, not a social science (even though he made references to Marxism in his dissertations).”³²

Under Mikhail Gorbachev he became a known figure. A cycle of his lectures was broadcast on television. He often appeared in the media and presented his views on the Huns and the Khazars. He also spoke a lot about his parents, especially after UNESCO announced 1989 the year of Akhmatova.³³ As the space for freedom of expression in the Soviet Union expanded, more of his books were published: *Древняя и Великая Степь Русь (Ancient Rus’ and the Great Steppe, 1989)*, *География этноса в исторический период (Geography of the Ethnos in the Historical Period, 1990)*, *Закон Божий (The Law of God, 1990)* and *Тысячелетие вокруг Каспия (Millennium around the Caspian Sea, 1991)*. Gumilev’s work is much admired by the philosopher Alexander Dugin, who is invited by the Polish media whenever a viewpoint of a controversial Russian nationalist is sought.

In 1991 Lev Gumilev suffered a stroke. He died on 15 June 1992 in Saint Petersburg and was buried at the Nikolian cemetery next to the Lavra of Alexander Nevsky. After the death of the prominent ethnologist and geographer, the following of his books were published: *От Руси к России: Очерки этнической (From Rus’ to Russia, 1992)* *Этносфера: История людей и история природы (Ethnosphere: The history of the people and nature, 1993)*, *Ритмы Евразии (Rhythms of Eurasia, 1993)*, and also *Из истории Евразии* (in Poland known as *Dzieje etnosów Wielkiego Stepu* 1993, transl. by Andrzej Nowak).

The myth of the wild nomads

A student of a Polish elementary school looking at a historical map of the antiquity and the Middle Ages sees the outlines of historic Greek cities and the

³¹ Idem: *Dzieje etnosów...*, p. 105 (afterword A. Nowak).

³² R. Paradowski: *Metafizyka ksenofobii...*, p. 77.

³³ “Her poems, by virtue of their simplicity, were easy to understand and remember for the mass reader. Liberals saw her as an opponent of Stalinism, religious people noticed her love for God, Patriots saw her as a true Russian. Even the Communists remarked that she had never been openly anti-Soviet”. E. Feinstein: *Anna...*, p. 252.

borders and administrative division of the Roman Empire. If the student is interested in history a bit more, they will also cast an eye over the map of China. The area of this country is often highlighted in colour. There are cities and borders, beyond which lie “savage tribes,” waiting to attack and destroy the prosperity and peace of the civilized world.³⁴ The examples given above show the sort of stereotype, which Lev Gumilev fought in many of his works. The Russian scholar believed that it was time to break with a stereotype that, according to him, had already become outdated in the Middle Ages.³⁵ According to Gumilev, the stereotype was the result of an erroneous understanding of history, according to which no developed culture and statehood existed beyond the borders of the mentioned countries. “For a long time scholars-Eurocentrists, and Sino-centrists alike – would consider Central (‘High’) Asia the frontier of the Oikumene and assigned no independent role to the people of those lands i.e. Scythians, Turkic peoples, Huns, Mongols and Russians. This was a failed interpretation! For in reality these peoples contributed immensely to the development of culture and the cultural differences between the East and West. They created somewhat of a separate region in the history of mankind, which was no less important than the region of Chinese or European culture.³⁶ Although Gumilev justifies all kinds of the tribal peoples’ wrongdoings far too often,³⁷ it is indeed difficult not to agree with him that the achievements of the people inhabiting the Great Steppe for centuries have been grossly disregarded, and fighting them has been placed at par with defending civilisation.

After all, Central Asia introduced the Huns, the Göktürks from the Old Turkish Khaganate and the Mongols of Genghis Khan into the international political arena. For many years they were treated as invaders, carrying death and destruction. However, in the works of Gumilev, they gained recognition. One of their main achievements, according to the author, was the defense of the Western world against the Chinese onslaught. “Europe did not become a part of China, which could easily have happened in the first century A.D. (the invasion of the Hans) and in the eighth century A.D. (the invasion of the Tangs). It was only thanks to the Huns, the Turkic peoples, the Mongols and the Russians, who were always willing to reconcile to fight off foreign invaders.”³⁸

³⁴ Lev Gumilev even called such an assertion “misplaced,” though the opinion does seem to be much exaggerated. “The common, unjustified belief is that the Huns were savage robbers, getting in the way of their quiet, industrious neighbours. L.N. Gumilov: *Śladami cywilizacji Wielkiego Stepu*. Warszawa 2004, p. 37.

³⁵ Id.: *Dzieje etnosów...*, p. 8.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

³⁷ The term “wrongdoings” can be understood as attacking the neighbours and murdering the populations of entire cities. However, it is worth noting that the Romans and Chinese had done the same in building their empires.

³⁸ L.N. Gumilev: *Dzieje etnosów...*, p. 5.

However, in the efforts to annihilate the “black legend,” Gumilev places more importance on proving how technologically and culturally advanced the tribes people were. Gumilev repeatedly states that their achievements are no worse than the technologies created by the Romans or Chinese. The researcher points in particular to the role of the materials which were used to build houses and weapons. After all, leather, though more comfortable and more practical in the Steppe, is perishable. Nevertheless, it is difficult to consider tribes, which were able to conquer and afterwards keep control over such vast territories, as backward. The Petersburgian wrote: “The Chinese were twenty times more powerful than the Huns and fifty times stronger than the Turkic tribes. It was the integrity and organizational skills of the nomads, learnt over years of life in the steppe, which brought them victory over the powerful enemy.”³⁹ A similar situation took place in the thirteenth century, when the tactics of Genghis Khan’s army commanders won the small tribal alliance victories over the much more powerful countries at that time, which for many scientists today is a mystery without a clear answer.

In the face of its enormous conquests, the nomads stood before the difficult challenge of maintaining such enormous swathes of land. Gumilev used the example of the great Old Turkic Khaganate stretching from the Yellow Sea all the way over to the Black Sea. The issue of maintaining control over the territories was to be resolved by the introduction of a very strict social organization, called the “El.” The centre of a Khaganate’s power remained the ord, i.e. the group closest to the Khan. Lev Nikolayevich described it as warriors, including their families and servants. Every nobleman also had his own ord. This entire structure was called the etos, the *kara budun*, i.e. the Turkish begs and nation.⁴⁰ Gumilev also used a comparison, which served to confirm the level of civilisational development of the Göktürks. The *kara budun* was similar to “the Senate and people of Rome” known from antiquity, whereas the term “ord” coincides with the Latin word *ordo*, meaning order. The ord was, after all, the core of the entire state organisation.⁴¹

Lev Gumilev, apart from scientific language, often used many epithets aimed at ridiculing the “backwardness” of those propagating the “black legend.” Someone who does not recognize the value of nomadic culture is making an “unwise and meretricious judgement.”⁴² Gumilev repeatedly wrote that the wars waged by the nomads were caused by their rivals and, of course, disagreed with the perception of the Great Steppe as the periphery of other civilizations. Although Gumilev’s claims are often referred to as controversial, it is difficult not to agree

³⁹ Idem: *Śladami cywilizacji...*, p. 63.

⁴⁰ Idem: *Driewnyje tiurki*. Moskva 1976. As cited in: *Dzieje etnosów...*, pp. 65–66.

⁴¹ Ibid..

⁴² Idem: *Śladami cywilizacji...*, p. 39.

with the opinion of Andrzej Nowak, expressed in the conclusion section of the *Dzieje Etnosów Wielkiego Stepu* claiming that “Lev Nikolaevich stood up [...] in defence of the Turkic and Mongolian peoples of the USSR, their rights to their own culture, tradition and history. He had rectified and dispelled the ‘black legend’ surrounding the ‘Tatar and Mongol’ yoke.”⁴³ The issue of the “Mongol occupation” is discussed in the second part of the paper.

“In alliance with the Horde”⁴⁴

Another interesting hypothesis put forward by Lev Gumilev is the relationship between the Russian princedoms and the Mongols of Ghenghis Khan (and his successors) as an alliance. Significant historical events include the battle of the river Kalka (1223) and the person of the Novgorodian Prince Alexander Nevsky. Gumilev did not use the terms “Tatar yoke” or “Mongolian occupation.” He was rather prone to say that “A Mongolian conquest of Rus never happened.”⁴⁵ At the same time, the St. Petersburgian does not deny that the medieval Russians remained to a certain extent dependant on the Horde. Nevertheless, he believed that Western Europe (along with the Poles) were a much greater threat to his nation. He never stated, however, that Russia has chosen the proverbial “lesser of two evils.” According to Gumilev, it was thanks to the positive relations with the Horde that the new Russia was born. Thus Eurasianism, whereby Russia became a successor of the Huns, Mongols and Göktürks, was to become the one and only acceptable solution for Russia.

For many years before the conquests of Genghis Khan, “a Russian chief, in his white shirt hanging to the knees, was no different in appearance from a regular warrior. His shaved head, a long topknot, a moustache hanging low and an earring in his ear gave him a strikingly oriental look.”⁴⁶ Rus’ focus away from the West therefore has a long tradition. Old Rus’ was experiencing a serious crisis at the beginning of the thirteenth century, which as Lev Nikolayevich put it, resulted from deteriorating levels of passionarity leading to the destruction of the Ethnos as an integral system.⁴⁷ Gumilev’s ethnogenesis theory is not, however, the subject of this study. Nevertheless, the concept of the “young” Mongols constituting the opposite of the “falling” Ruthenians should be clear

⁴³ Idem: *Dzieje etnosów...*, p. 104 (afterword by A. Nowak).

⁴⁴ The title is taken from Lev Gumilev’s book *From Rus’ to Russia*. This is the title given to the second part of his book.

⁴⁵ L.N. Gumilow: *Od Rusi...*, p. 114.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁴⁷ See *Ibid.*, p. 107.

for those demonstrating an interest in human history. Both the ethnoses collided with each other in the first decades of the thirteenth century. According to a popular theory, hordes of Tartars invaded Eastern Europe, wreaking destruction and conquering one principedom after another. What did Lev Gumilev have to say about this?

First of all, the Petersburgian stated that the Mongols did not seek to fight the Ruthenians. Therefore, Tartar soldiers were once again forced to fight, and the war was essentially defensive in nature.⁴⁸ The Tatars had long-standing disputes with the Kipchaks inhabiting the Black Sea steppes, who had arrived from Asia. These, in turn entered into an alliance with Ruthenian Kingdoms. The Mongols came to the Ruthenians to make peace and break their alliance with the Kipchaks. The Ruthenians refused their offer and made the horrific mistake of killing the Mongols' messengers. In this way they violated their trust, which according to the rights established by Genghis-Khan (*Jasa*), is inexcusable. Gumilev summarised this fact by stating that "The Princes of Ruthenia did not have a clue about this law and thus had forced the Mongols to fight."⁴⁹ This constitutes the second element of his evaluation. It is based on the acknowledgement of the role of cultural differences, which both parties knew little of. Such was the reason for the conflict, which turned out to be completely unnecessary. Another proof of the role of the word and trust among the Mongols were the events following the battle of the Kalka river. To avoid being massacred, some Russian soldiers surrendered after a promise made by the Tartars that "they would not spill a drop of blood of any prisoner of war." "The Mongols, as promised, kept their word. They laid the prisoners on the ground, covered them with planks and sat down on them to feast. So not a drop of blood was actually spilled."⁵⁰ In this way Gumilev made it clear to the reader that it was the Asians who were "civilized," who, unlike the Russians, had kept their word. They killed the messengers and "according to the standards of law at that time, any act of violence against a messenger deserved condemnation and punishment."⁵¹

The famed Batu, the grandson of Genghis Khan, found it difficult to forget about the murder of the messengers. In the course of the so-called Great Western Expedition,⁵² the Mongols invaded Kievian Rus', Poland (the famous battle of Leg-

⁴⁸ Ryszard Paradowski aptly summed up this part of Gumilev's argumentation by concluding how interesting it is that a small Mongolian tribe, which had only led defensive wars, managed to create the largest empire in the world. R. Paradowski: *Idea Rosji- Eurazji...*, p. 162.

⁴⁹ L.N. Gumilow: *Od Rusi...*, p. 109.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 109–110.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Lev Gumilev did not like this name. "Batu-Khan's Great Western Expedition should rather be called 'the great cavalry raid.'" Gumilev took into account the relatively small number of soldiers taking part in battle. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

nica) and Hungary.⁵³ The Kozielsk Siege of 1238 was remembered by the Russians as a place of one of the largest massacres in history. After a few weeks of fighting, the Mongols stormed into the city and carried out a carnage. However, Gumilev found justification for this massacre too. Again he suggested that a lack of intercultural understanding was the cause. The late Mstislav, the Chernigov Kozelsk prince, had contributed to the death of the Tatar messengers sixteen years earlier. This is how Lev Nikolayevich put it: “Of course, from the point of view of a contemporary human being, the behaviour of the Mongols may seem inexcusably cruel. Let us not forget, however, that they were true to their beliefs as much as we are to ours.”⁵⁴ Gumilev also added that the residents of other kingdoms refused to come to the rescue as they perfectly understood the reasons for the cruelty of the Mongols.

After the Great Western Expedition, Batu Khan returned to the area of present-day Volgograd and there founded the town of Saray, which became the capital of the powerful Golden Horde. The founding of this state, according to Lev Gumilev, determined the further course of the ethnogenesis of the Russian superethnos. The Horde had collected taxes only from the southern Rus’ kingdoms, which serves as a proof that the northern ones remained independent. However, the populace of the Kievan and Chernigov lands opposed the taxes and emigrated in mass numbers to the so-called *Zalesskaya Rus’*, i.e. to Tver, Serpukhov, Kolomna, Muroma, and “the small town of Moscow, which was surrounded by forestland.”⁵⁵ As a result, the land inhabited by the ethnos had changed. Any change to the land inhabited by a people, according to Lev Nikolaevich, is one of the most important factors shaping a population. Russian traditions, as it were, were transferred from the Steppe to forest areas.⁵⁶

The genius of an outstanding individual, namely that of prince Alexander of Novogorod, later referred to as Alexander Nevski, proved to be key in the formation of a new alliance.⁵⁷ There existed favourable circumstances for this

⁵³ Also here the Mongols had to wage a war, for their messengers, sent to these countries, had also been killed. Then their messengers visited Poland where they were killed by the Poles. In the war that unfolded, the Mongols captured Kraków, and in the battle of Legnica that followed, they destroyed the Polish and German army stationing there. Mongol messengers were also killed in Hungary. In retaliation, the Mongols defeated the army of the Hungarian king in the battle of Saio River [...]. Taught by bitter experience, they did not send any messengers in the Czech.” *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 114–115.

⁵⁷ Alexander Nevsky was chosen by the Russians as the most popular figure in the entire history of their country. In the “Name of Russia” plebiscite, approx. 50 million votes were cast. The Duke beat Peter Stolypin, Joseph Stalin, Alexander Pushkin, Peter the Great and Vladimir Lenin. The choice is explained by the Russian quest for a new identity, to fill in the void after the fall of the Soviet Union. According to Gumilev, the policy of Alexander Nevsky is based on an alliance with the Horde against the West. Therefore, this choice may indicate certain trends that are beginning to dominate among our eastern neighbours. Retrieved from: [<http://www.rp.pl/>

to happen. On the one hand, Rus' was threatened by the "Western superethnos" in the form of Germans and Poles. On the other hand, Batu Khan needed allies from the Mongol Empire to help him fight his enemies. Gumilev clearly stated that "there were no longer any political reasons for further war between Rus' and the Mongols. But even more importantly, the emotional motives of conflict had by then clearly disappeared. Batu was called a good Khan in Rus."⁵⁸ This does not mean, however, that all of Rus' adopted the new political line of Alexander. The Petersburgian even mentioned the prince's brother, who was a "Westerniser," which in this context was presented as the greatest sin and betrayal of all kind. "His own brother Andrew was himself a Westerniser and declared that he was forming an alliance with the Swedes, Poles and Livonians in order rid his lands of the Mongols. The Mongols found out about the alliance most probably thanks to Alexander Nevsky himself."⁵⁹ Gumilev called the opponents of the prince as individuals who "were losing their passionarity."

With time, taxes were imposed on all of Rus'. For Lev Nikolayevich, however, this was not proof of recognising the Horde's domination, but money needed to stave off the enemies ("army maintenance tax"). Thanks to the alliance with Saray, Alexander strengthened his position (receiving over time the titles of Prince of Kiev and Vladimir), and the political choice was soon praised by the Orthodox Church. Gumilev did not even try to hide his enthusiasm for the medieval ruler. "Alexander Yaroslavovich needs to be given credit for his skills in understanding the ethnopolitical situation and for his ability in overcoming his personal emotions for the sake of saving his motherland. In 1251, Alexander went to the Horde of Batu Khan, befriended him, and then fraternised with his son Sartaki. In this way Alexander became Khan's stepson. The alliance between the Horde and Rus was established thanks to the patriotism and the generosity of Prince Alexander, whereas the "Mongolian cavalry helped him fend off the Livonian legions attacking Novgorod and Pskov."⁶⁰

He goes on to say that "In the opinion of posterity, Aleksandrer Yaroslavovich's choice earned him the highest approval. His unparalleled heroism in the defense of the homeland led to his beatification by the Orthodox Church."⁶¹ Elsewhere, Lev Nikolayevich added: "The grand Duke's policy proved far-sighted: the Tatars, who were invited to serve Moscow, helped the city grow in strength but at the same time contributed to a decline of the Horde."⁶² Lev Gumilev mentioned of the "sad" fate of the old lands of Kievan Rus' which first fell into the hands of Lithuania and then Poland. The indigenous peoples of those lands

artykul/11,241289_Sredniowieczny_wodz_pokonal_Stalina_.html (12.12.2009)].

⁵⁸ L.N. Gumilow: *Od Rusi...*, p. 118.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁶⁰ *Idem*: *Dzieje etnosów...*, p. 93.

⁶¹ *Idem*: *Od Rusi...*, p. 119.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 172.

which had become part of the Western superethnos, had to endure the fate of second class citizens for their previous alliance with the Golden Horde.⁶³

After Saray accepted Islam as his religion, there was no pressure for the Ruthenian kingdoms to switch faith. This is considered further proof of Rus' independence from the Horde. However, it is worth mentioning that the religious affairs of the Mongols were treated with utmost tolerance, although there were instances of people leaving the Horde for their lack of acceptance of Islamic rules. All these aspects led Gumilev to conclude that "North Eastern Rus' joined the Mongol superethnos." As mentioned, Batu Khan was referred to by the inhabitants of Rus' as "a good Khan." However, in later times, as Gumilev writes, the subsequent khans of the Golden Horde were referred to as "tsars." They were called either 'good tsar' Jani Beg or 'terrible tsar' Uzbeg. "As such, the khans of Saray "fell under the category of Byzantine emperors"⁶⁴ in the Russian geopolitical mindset.

The election of Alexander Nevsky determined the future of Rus and shaped the course of events in future Russia. This involved another "passionarity impulse," which the emerging super-ethnos experienced.

Slavs, Tatars and the Finno-Ugric peoples

Gumilev is a mystery to those who seek to categorise the views of individual researchers. On the one hand, the Petersburgian presents an anti-Semitic viewpoint (e.g. stories about "the Judean Khazaria"⁶⁵). On the other hand, his theory claiming that Russians originated from peoples, whom radical right groups con-

⁶³ Ibid. p. 126. Elsewhere, Gumilev writes: "The Great, White and Small Russians [*translator's note: a geographical reference*] who submitted to Polish rule, were completely loyal to the Polish authorities. The Poles, however, looked down on their Orthodox neighbours and treated them with contempt. It is unfair, however, to state that the true reason behind this were religious animosities. From the point of view of the Catholics, the Orthodox were 'schismatics', but their sin was much smaller than, say, that of the Protestants, whom the Catholic Church considered as heretics [...]. But as soon as mention was made of the Orthodox Church, Polish tolerance suddenly all but disappeared." Ibid. p. 222

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 126.

⁶⁵ This concerns the relationship between the Khazar Khaganate (which Judaism had a large influence on) and Kievan Rus', which Lev Gumilev describes in a rather peculiar way. This is the conclusion that Ryszard Paradowski came to: "Alongside the 19 cases where the term 'Khazaria' appeared, the term 'Judaic' was used eight times, whereas the word 'Jewish' about twice. The fact that this term is not common and has been used only to bring the ethnic substrate of the Khazar nation (one of its ethnic substrates) closer to the reader, is the use of terms which by no measure can be considered neutral. One of them is the term 'military and trade octopus of Khazaria' which sells the goods of Russia and the lives of its soldiers". R. Paradowski: *Idea Rosji-Eurazji...*, p. 176.

sidered as “ethnically suspicious,” as well as his voiced praise of the Turkic and Mongolian peoples of Central Asia, contradicts anyone attempting to term him a fascist. This makes Gumilev’s views so interesting.

According to his theory, the Russian super-ethnos consists of three substrates. The first of these are the “ancient Russians and migrants from Lithuania,” that is, in short – the Slavic element. It is that element which, according to the “racially pure” ideology, is the only and exclusive part of the modern Russian nation. Gumilev, however, took a step further and concluded that the hundreds of years of alliance with the Golden Horde must have left a mark. Hence another substrate are the Tatars (“the Horde migrants”). The third substrate in turn constitute the Ugro-Finnic peoples, also called the Samoyedic peoples. They are former Eastern European, Ural and Siberian tribes inhabiting today’s Russian Federation. Hungarians and Finns, among others, belong to this family of nations. All of the above have come together to form the Russian super-ethnos.⁶⁶ For this very reason, according to Gumilev, the Russians should not feel offended when they hear themselves being compared to the Huns or Mongols, as this is a historical fact.

In explaining his theory of the Russian super-ethnos, Gumilev often made references to the already mentioned passionarity impulses. Such an impulse appeared in Rus’ in the early thirteenth century. As a result, by the end of the thirteenth century, a new historical force had emerged, namely that of Moscow with its Orthodox archbishop. “It was at that time, in the fourteenth century’, that Rus was termed “Holy Rus.” The new name indicated that the old Kievan Rus’ was replaced by a completely new ethnos, namely the Great Russian ethnos with its ethnosocial system – the Grand Duchy of Moscow.”⁶⁷

Giving full political significance to the new centre of Rus was connected with the gaining of independence from Constantinople and Saray, which occurred in the fifteenth century. The calling of Jonah, the Ryazan bishop to the position of the Metropolitan of Moscow by the Sobor of Russian bishops in 1441, meant that Rus’ no longer reckoned with the centre of Eastern Christianity. The Local Orthodox Church later achieved independence (“the third Rome”), which for Gumilev was proof of a very high level of passionarity, allowing for the conversion of the ethnos into a super-ethnos.⁶⁸ At the same time people started talking about the “freeing the nation from the Tatar yoke,” which meant becoming independent from the Horde. Gumilev, in principle, rejected the term “Tatar yoke” (“which had simply been non-existent”⁶⁹), and the subsequent battles and clashes (e.g. the Great stand on the Ugra river in 1480) he explained as conflicts between opposing political alliances, which were formed between states established as a result of subsequent political crises in

⁶⁶ L.N. Gumilov: *Od Rusi...*, pp. 11–12.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

the Golden Horde, that is, e.g., between the Grand Duchy of Moscow, the Crimean and Kazan Khanates, and the Nogai Horde. Hence there was never a war for the liberation from dependency. According to Gumilev, it was a “long-lasting battle between two alliances, namely the Novgorodian, Lithuanian and Golden Horde coalition against the Moscow, Kasimov and Crimean coalition.”⁷⁰

The most transparent example of the truth behind Gumilev’s hypotheses are not the constituents making up his interpretation of the history of Russia, but the descent of Ivan IV the Terrible. The first all-Russian tsar was the son of Basil III and Helena Glinska. An ancestor of the Glinski noble family was Mamai, a Tatar commander in the battle of Kulikovo in 1380, which the famous Dmitriy Donskoy won. Therefore there was much Tatar blood flowing in the veins of Ivan the Terrible. Richard Paradowski commented on the situation by writing: “It can no longer be a secret to anyone that he had to be at least a half-Tatar.”⁷¹ This is not something which is generally known. In turn, the war waged by the Tsar against the Boyars was nothing more than an ancestral revenge he was unaware of. “Ivan, though he knew not of this, by suppressing the Boyars, took vengeance for his ancestor, since it was the Boyars who had humiliated him at the battle of Kulikovo.”⁷²

Searching for Tatar roots in Russian rulers and an analysis of subsequent marriages is not the purpose of this study and it is presented only as an example. However, it is worth mentioning one more Tsar, whose family descended from the people of the Steppe. Boris Godunov, who had ruled Rus’ at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, descended from the mentioned “Horde migrants.”

The Godunov dynasty arrived in Rus’ during the rule of Ivan Kalita, i.e. two hundred years before Boris Godunov’s birth. Lev Gumilev made mention of this and referred to Alexander Pushkin, who simply called Godunov a “Tatar”,⁷³ which in this case served as an insult against the Tsar. It is, however, his ancestry and the way he was perceived by other Russians which is much more interesting. As a final comment to our dissertations on parentage, an analysis of the family tree of Gumilev is very thought-provoking itself. The nickname adopted by Lev’s mother, as mentioned at the beginning of the paper, was a reference to a Tatar ancestor of hers. Therefore, the ancestral connotations of the leading representative of neo-Eurasianism are an ideal example in their own right.

Russian eastward expansion, which began in the fifteenth century and lasted until the twentieth century, and which defined the southern and eastern border of the Romanov Empire, constitutes yet another constituent affecting the structure of the Russian super-ethnos. Colonization of the Great Steppe by the Russians

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ R. Paradowski: *Idea Rosji–Eurazji...*, p. 169.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ “An honour it is for Rus’ and for us! Yesterday a slave, a Tatar, Maluta’s son-in-law, an executioner’s son-in-law and executioner himself in soul [...]” L.N. Gumilow: *Od Rusi...*, p. 200. Translation by Seweryn Pollak.

meant the subordination of this huge area of land into one state organism. The Huns, Mongols and Turkic peoples had done just that earlier. The Petersburgian attempted to find an answer to the question how it was possible to colonise such vast swaths of territory without invoking numerous uprisings and long-term wars. Many nationalities of Ugro-Finnic (the third pillar of the Russian super-ethnos), Mongol and Turkish descent live between the Urals and the Pacific Ocean to this day. Following the line of thought of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Gumilev came to conclude that “the Russians have the ability to understand and accept other nations. And indeed, the Russians, for example, understand the Europeans a lot better than they understand the Russians. The ancestors of today’s Russians very well understood the distinctness of the other nations they shared their land with. Hence the ethnic diversity of Russia kept expanding.”⁷⁴ Given the history of Russian relations with the countries of Central Europe over the last several hundred years, one must admit Gumilev’s explanation is overly simplistic in nature. But such is the right of the author. However, it needs mentioning that Russian colonization (accompanied by the conclusion of mixed marriages) of vast expanses of Asia with its numerous peoples, went rather smoothly.

Russia, a Eurasian power in geographical terms, rose on the ruins of the Empire of Genghis Khan. However, Lev Gumilev concluded that the country’s “Eurasianism” is not just due to Russia’s location on the map of the world. It also results from the nation’s mentality⁷⁵ and heritage, which point the way forward for every subsequent Russian generation. For, as he said: “Russia shall only be saved as a Eurasian power and thanks to Eurasianism itself.”⁷⁶

Conclusion

The growing influence of Lev Nikolaevich Gumilev’s ideas cannot go unnoticed. Neo-Eurasianism is a course the Russia of today can choose to take after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Gaining insight into the thoughts of Anna Akhmatova’s son allows one to see Russia from a slightly different perspective – i.e. more as a part of the world which functions according to its own laws, than yet another Eastern European state which should turn westwards.

Gumilev, based on selected historical facts, presented the Russians with a different perspective on the heritage of the old empires of the Great Steppe.

⁷⁴ L.N. Gumilov: *Od Rusi...*, p. 237.

⁷⁵ “Eurasia is understood here not only as an enormous continent, but also as the super-ethnos created in its centre bearing the same name. Ibid. p. 274 (footnote 1).

⁷⁶ Idem: *Ritmy Jewrazii*. Moskva 1993, p. 31. As cited in: R. Paradowski: *Idea Rosji-Eurazji...*, p. 155.

Previously, any attempt made at comparing Russians to Mongols were treated as an insult. These days Russians should see this rather as a source of pride. The success of the super-ethnos is not only based on its ability to maintain dominance in the same region for a number of centuries, but also on the nature of its population and its biology resulting from hundreds of years of intermingling, the best proof of which is the family tree of Ivan the Terrible and Lev Nikolayevich himself. It is impossible for Russians to have remained “racially pure” Slavs under such a complex history of their great state.

It is also noteworthy to see just how popular Lev Gumilev’s ideas have been among the representatives of Turkic nations of the former Soviet Union. Nursultan Nazarbayev, the President of Kazakhstan, who has been ruling the country since the 1980s, shares Gumilev’s ideology. Nazarbayev was once even close to becoming Mikhail Gorbachev’s successor as the leader of the USSR. He was one of the founders of the Eurasian Union. Nazarbayev first mentioned the idea of creating a union in the mid – 1990s, back when Yeltsin’s Russia did not even want to hear of it. Vladimir Putin has a different view on this matter.

Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan since 1998, has been home to the Lev Gumilev Eurasian University for the last several years. It was founded thanks to the personal initiative of the president. A similar spirit is shared in the political and social life of the Turkic peoples of Russia. In Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan, stands the statue of the scholar. The growing percentage of non-Slavic peoples of Central Asian and Ural descent in the overall population of the Russian Federation also needs mentioning. It is something that the government in Moscow must take into account in managing its strategic interests; the interests of the largest country in the world. Gumilev’s ideas may prove to be a valuable source of direction in this respect.

It is interesting to note that the largest and most famous battle of World War II took place on the ruins of the former capital of the Golden Horde. The Soviet Army, represented by many nations forming part of the USSR, won the battle of Stalingrad, which lies in the vicinity of the legendary Saray. The enormous “The Motherland Calls” statue was erected to commemorate the battle. The concrete monument depicts a woman with a sword leading soldiers in battle. What is more, it was built on the Mamayev Kurgan, a height overlooking the city. The height was given its name after the war and referred to the previously described Tartar ancestor of Ivan the Terrible. Today the Mamayev Kurgan is a symbol commemorating the defenders of Stalingrad. Many, who lost their lives in battle, are buried in the hill. Both the Kurgan and the statue without a doubt carry unprecedented symbolic value.