Preface

In 2016, our Department of History began to publish, along with detailed abstracts of new publications, which used to be our main ‘product’, also shorter annotations. We are still working at their format, but it is already clear that they will only contain the most important information about an article or a monograph, without any detailed retelling of its contents. We hope it will allow us to reflect in our abstract journal much more new publications than we were able to do previously. Such an opportunity seems to be quite significant, as in the Soviet time there were some thirty employees at our department, and twelve issues of the abstract journal were printed a year, whereas now we have only fifteen researchers and are only able to publish four issues of the journal a year, so the selection of sources for abstracts is actually rather far from following any regular criteria. Writing annotations along with detailed abstracts is still an experimental work, its perspectives are rather unclear, but the annotations which I have already written are worth to publish them in the Internet. I am also going to make annotations in English for some books for which I have previously published detailed abstracts in Russian.

As the annotations are rather short, I will post all of them in a single PDF file with a set of bookmarks instead of a table of contents. As soon as new annotations appear, I will update the file and announce this in the blog. An actual version of the collection is always available on my Web site at http://michael-mints.ru.

My own main field of research interest is the history of the Soviet Union, especially before and in the time of the Second World War; so here I am going to post mostly annotations of books on the Soviet history or on history of post-Soviet Russia. I also decided to limit myself to annotations of books published in Russian. There are quite a lot of reference resources in the English part of the Internet, and they are much more informative than my personal Web site. On the other hand, the most part of Russian academic literature still remains almost unknown for the international research community because only a few papers are translated into English. I hope my collection of annota-
tions will become one more bridge, although a bit narrow, between Russian historians and their colleagues in other countries.


The book of Aleksandr Ivanov deals with experience of deported Kalmyks in Tyumen and Omsk oblasts. Tyumen Oblast was separated from Omsk Oblast in 1944, the largest group of deported Kalmyks lived in its territory—up to a quarter of the whole number. The author investigates not only the process of developing and realization of political decisions, but also Kalmyks’ own estimations of their condition, their attempts to adapt to new circumstances, an impact of the deportation on their identity. Chronologically the work covers the period since 1943 till 1959, i.e. since the time of deportation till the return of the Kalmyks to their homeland. The author does not consider the deportation itself; instead he concentrates on the processes that took place after it and are almost not investigated yet.

Methodologically the research is based on works of Peter I. Holquist. The author regards political repressions, including those against ethnic minorities, as a ‘policy aimed at forming the population through interventions into the social environment in order to “cut off malicious elements” that counteract the building of the socialist society and to “implant useful ones” contributing to its development’ (p. 14). He used documents of central and local authorities from the State Archive of the Russian Federation, the Russian State Archive of Economics and several local archives in Tyumen and Omsk oblasts and in Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, memoirs of former special settlers (including unpublished ones) and interviews that he collected himself in 2009–12 in Khanty-Mansi and Yamalo-Nenets autonomous okrugs, including both interviews of former special settlers and those locals who used to communicate to them.

Ivanov comes to a conclusion that the deportation of Kalmyks happened because the party leaders stereotypically thought they were a ‘sick’ nation, infected with gangsterism, that should be corrected. The deportation itself was organized as a ‘Chekist-military operation of the NKVD’ (operation ‘Ulusy’) in response to collaboration of some part of Kalmyks with Germans and was therefore similar to other deportations of ‘guilty’ nations. At the same time in later years the Soviet authorities did not see the exile of Kalmyks as a repression; from their point of view it was more likely a way to ‘improve quality’ of the population that allowed also to provide the rear areas of the Soviet Union with cheap workforce. No separate special settlements were established for exiled Kalmyks, they lived among the ‘ordinary’ citizens, the regime of exile was less strict for communists and former NKVD officers, many decisions of the authorities were aimed to normalize the relations between the deportees and the local population.

All these measures, as well as delivery of necessary food and manufactured goods to supply the exiles, mean the deportation of Kalmyks was not a genocide or an attempt of their forced marginal-
ization or assimilation. Nevertheless, the consequences of that policy, based on the most flagrant violation of civil rights of the whole nation, were catastrophic. The death toll during the deportation reached 40 per cent of the total number of Kalmyks because the supply was insufficient and often behind schedule in the beginning. Life in exile and a status of involuntary workforce made the deportees people of the meaner sort that was a serious trauma. A great damage was caused to the culture of Kalmyks as schoolteaching was in Russian. It is not surprising that Kalmyks themselves see the events of 1943–59 as a national tragedy and think its only positive result was the forming of all-Kalmyk national identity and overcoming the so called ulusizm when the great part of Kalmyks associated themselves more with local communities than with the nation as a whole. After the regime of exile was abolished in late 1950s, almost all the Kalmyks came back to their homeland.

**Yu. Z. Kantor, Best Frenemies: Secret Cooperation between the Soviet Union and Germany in 1920s—1930s**


Yuliia Kantor (the State Hermitage Museum) analyses in her book the reasons of Soviet-German rapprochement in 1920s, the impact of Soviet-German cooperation on national defense capability of the both countries, the role of intelligence services, the reasons of repressions in the Red Army in 1937–8, their consequences for military potential of the Soviet Union and their impact on the estimations of the USSR abroad.

The source base of the research make the documents of the Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, the Central Archive of the Federal Security Service, the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, the German Federal Archives, the German Federal Military Archive etc.

The book consists of an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion; the author considers the Soviet-German cooperation before Hitler’s rise to power, the ‘Tukhachevsky Case’ of 1937, the further development of Soviet-German relations in 1930s.

Kantor comes to a conclusion that the military cooperation between Soviet Russia—the Soviet Union and Germany was caused by the animosity of both countries towards the Western democracies. The Soviet state needed modern armament and technology for its military buildup and for the further ‘revolutionary’ expansion, Germany was looking for a way to circumvent restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles. The Soviet government was the most active in developing that cooperation, that corresponded to Lenin’s conception of using the tensions between capitalist countries to the benefit of the USSR. It was Trotskii, and since mid-1920s Stalin, who played the key role in building relationships with Germany.

The cooperation of 1920s—early 1930s was of great importance both for the Soviet and German military potential. The Germans had an opportunity to try out tanks, airplanes and chemical weapons at the Soviet testing areas and to teach tankmen and aviators at secret schools in Lipetsk and Kazan’; the Soviet Union gained access to German technology, and visits of Soviet comman-
ders to Germany, as well as participation of German officers in Soviet military exercises, allowed the Soviet military to upgrade their skills significantly.

The author found no evidence that the ‘Tukhachevsky Case’ of 1937 was provoked by the German secret services. According to her, the repressions at the Soviet armed forces were caused by the internal policy of Stalin and the main goal of purges was the liquidation of professional opposition at the army and an absolute control of political leadership over the military. In practice the consequences of repressions were loss of initiative, backing off of advanced studies and a generational gap in the officer corps that to a large extent derailed the previous exchange of knowledge and experience with officers of Reichswehr.

After Hitler’s rise to power the military cooperation as such was curtailed, but contacts in military-industrial area went on. Over the whole period of 1930s the Soviet government tried to reach further rapprochement with Germany, although that time both states were already pursuing diametrically opposite purposes. A culmination of those efforts of the Soviet diplomacy was the signing of Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact in 1939.

**B. N. Kovalev, Volunteers in the War of Someone Else: Essays in History of the Blue Division**


The book of Boris Kovalev (Novgorod State University) deals with the Blue Division, a Spanish volunteer division that took part in the operations on the Eastern Front of World War II on the side of Nazi Germany. Its Russian historiography is still rather poor, although 45,482 Spanish soldiers were fighting on the Soviet land altogether, among them 4,954 were killed and more than 10 thousand wounded. The author tried to fill this gap. According to him, the book was initially intended as a history of the Blue Division, but finally took the form of a collection of essays describing the most important parts of its ‘biography’.

The research is mostly a descriptive one and is based on the documents of several central Russian archives (RGASPI—the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, RGVA—the Russian State Military Archive, TsAMO—the Central Archive of the Ministry of Defense), of local archives in Novgorod and Saint-Petersburg and of the German Federal Military Archive (Bundesarhiv-Militärrahv), and also on memoirs of the participants of the events. At the local Communist Party archives one can get, among others, documents of partisan units, at the archives of the Federal Security Service (FSB)—trophy documents of the occupation authorities and of collaborationist forces, including newspapers. The author also had an opportunity to interview several residents of Novgorod Oblast who had experienced the Spanish occupation in their childhood.

Officially the division was called the 250th Infantry Division of the Wehrmacht, but since the very time of its creation, the phrase Blue Division emerged both in Spanish and German documents, because of the blue shirts of members of the Spanish Falange. The division was formed in June–July 1941 and was moved to Bavaria in July where it received German armament and underwent
training during a month under command of German instructors. It had 19 thousand soldiers and officers. In late August—early October the division was moved to the Eastern Front.

In his essays, the author traces the operations in which the volunteers of the Blue Division took part, their relations with Germans and with the local population of the occupied Soviet territory, the experience of Russian émigrés and collaborators who served at the division, as well as that of the Spanish émigrés who served at the Red Army and thus continued their civil war in the forests of North-Western Russia. The final essay deals with the experience of Spanish prisoners of war.

Initially the Blue Division was to be included into the Army Group Center, but then, during its moving to the Soviet territory, it was directed to the Army Group North. In October 1941 the Spaniards took part in the German offensive to Tikhvin, but had to retreat behind the Volkhov River in early December. In the first half of 1942 the division was holding positions under Novgorod, some of its subunits took part in capturing the encircled troops of the Soviet 2nd Shock Army. In August the division was moved under Leningrad, its new positions were under Krasnogvardeisk (Gatchina), Pushkin and Slutsk (Pavlovsk). In October 1943 Franco declared the change of Spain’s status from a non-belligerent state to neutrality and withdrew the Blue Division from the Eastern Front. 2,500 of its soldiers decided to go on fighting against Bolshevism, they formed the ‘Legion of Spanish volunteers’ (or the ‘Blue Legion’) that stayed near Lyuban where it was completely destroyed during the Soviet offensive in late January 1944. Those Spaniards who survived in that battle took part in hostilities on the Soviet–German front until spring 1945, some of them became citizens of the Third Reich. The Soviet troops captured about 400 Spanish volunteers altogether, a hundred of them died. Others could only come back to Spain in 1954.

N. Lebina, Soviet Everyday Life: Norms and Anomalies. From the War Communism to Stalin’s Years

N. Lebina, Sovetskaia povsednevnost’: normy i anomalii. Ot voennogo kommunizma k bol’shomu stiliu (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2015).

A new book by Natalia B. Lebina is an expanded edition of her monograph Povsednevnnaia zhizn’ sovetskogo goroda: normy i anomalii, 1920–1930-e gody [Everyday life of the Soviet city: norms and anomalies, 1920s—1930s] (Saint-Petersburg: Neva: Letnii sad, 1999) and contains an analysis of the impact of state policy on the shaping of the Soviet everyday life in the period from the War Communism to Stalin’s years. The monograph includes a preface, three parts (each one has three chapters), a conclusion, notes, a name index, and some photographs of 1920s—1930s.

The first part of the book deals with the retail system under Bolsheviks. In the second part the author describes the codes of conduct of the citizens in their free time and the attempts of the state to regulate the gender relations and even the intimacies. The third part contains an analysis of such forms of deviant behavior as drinking, drug abuse, suicide and prostitution.

The author comes to a conclusion that norms and structures of the Soviet everyday life, as they had formed by the moment of Stalin’s death, cannot be seen as to the full extent communist. The norms generated by the planned economy and by the political system of Stalinism coexisted with
strict social hierarchy, demonstrative luxury, 'almost clerical conceptions of morality' etc. The most serious changes began to show in the second half of the 1930s, with the beginning of the time of mature Stalinism, when many norms were rejected that had formed in the first years after the October Revolution.

**A. I. Shirokov, Dal’stroi in Socio-Economical Development of the North-East of the Soviet Union (1930s—1950s)**


Anatolii Ivanovich Shirokov is a member of the Federation Council from Magadan Oblast, before this appointment he was the rector of the North-Eastern State University. He is a member of United Russia Party, so his views became rather anti-Western in recent years, but his monograph about Dal'stroi is quite academic and free of any kind of political propaganda.

Dal’stroi was an infamous Soviet state agency in 1930s—1950s that functioned at the same time as an industrial enterprise and as an extraordinary local government in the north-eastern part of the USSR. Shirokov’s research covers the whole period of its existence, from establishment till liquidation. The book has three chapters corresponding to the main parts of the history of Dal’stroi: prewar period, World War II, the crisis of 1946–57.

The research is based on documents of central party and state organs, archival collections of Dal’stroi itself, statistic data, mass media publications of the period under review and a huge amount of memoirs including accounts both of the former GULAG prisoners and of scientists who took part in investigation of the Soviet North-East. According to the author, the texts of the latter group belong to a mixed genre of half-memoirs and half-research papers that makes them especially important.

Dal’stroi was established in 1931 as a state trust for industrial and road construction in Kolyma basin (*Dal’stroi* is the shortened name composed of *Dal’nii*—‘Far’, meaning the Far East, and *stroi-tel’stvo*—‘construction’), but its real functions were not limited to the pure economical activity. It was subordinated directly to the Council of Labour and Defense, later to the Council of People’s Commissars and gained the right for privileged supply and administrative control over the territory of its activities. The whole region was thus transformed into an internal colony with an extraordinary administration system. From the very beginning Dal’stroi widely used the labour of prisoners of the North-East Corrective Labour Camp of the OGPU (Sevvostlag, or SVITL—*Severo-Vostochnyi ispravitel’no-trudovoi lager’*) that was established in 1932 and was actually subordinated to the trust, although formally was a part of the GULAG. In 1938 Dal’stroi was transformed into the NKVD Main Administration for Construction in the Far North, but retained both its shortened name and privileged position, including administrative autonomy.

The main task of Dal’stroi was extraction of mineral resources, first of all gold, after World War II—also uranium. Volumes of extraction of gold increased up to 80 tons in 1940 that made Dal’stroi one of the biggest gold suppliers in the world and produced a mistaken impression of its
great economic effectiveness. The real price for that were the heavy forced labour of prisoners and depletion of region’s resources which not only led to demise of ecological systems on vast territories and caused a serious damage to indigenous peoples, but also provided a basis for the further crisis of Dal’stroi itself.

In pursuit to achieve the biggest extraction volume, the administration of the trust did not pay enough attention to the development of other branches of local economy that completely depended on supplies from the ‘mainland’. Only placer accumulations were exploited, not primary deposits that made up to 70 percent of the region’s mineral resources. As a result, workers lived mostly in temporary settlements with poor living conditions and overflow of males which complicated family formation so that people did not often settle in the region permanently. When the placer accumulations were depleted, production costs rose sharply. The crisis became already obvious in late 1940s. In 1953, Dal’stroi was transferred from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Ministry of Metallurgical Industry of the Soviet Union and the most part of its labour camps—to the Ministry of Justice. In December 1953 the Magadan Oblast was established; Dal’stroi thus lost its administrative functions and became a purely economic organization. A sharp deficit of workforce has added to other difficulties, as the number of prisoners declined considerably after Stalin’s death, and the population began to leave Kolyma when former restrictions on choice of domicile were dismantled. In such conditions, the authorities had to recognize an inefficiency of Stalinist methods of economic development in the Far East, and in 1957 Dal’stroi was liquidated. Overcoming the negative consequences of its activity ‘required huge administrative efforts and material resources in 1950s—1960s’ (p. 653).