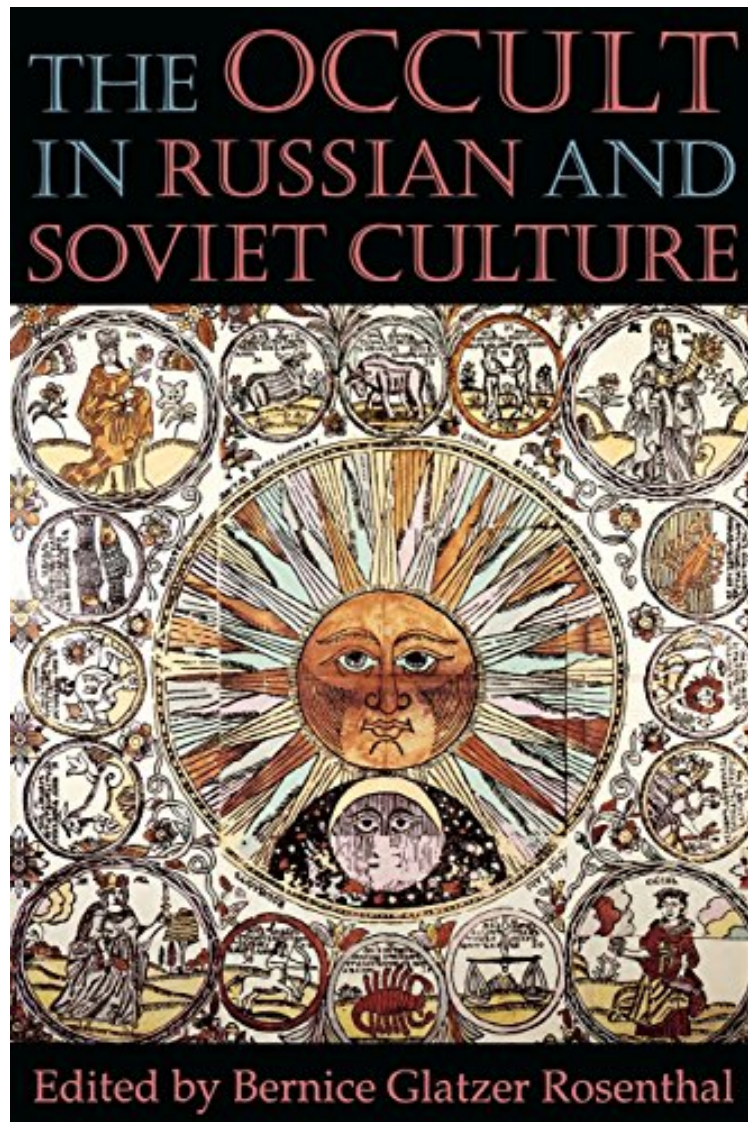


(Download pdf ebook) The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture

The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture

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From Brand: Cornell University Press : The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture:

34 of 38 people found the following review helpful. Russian and Soviet Occultism and Esoterica. By New Age of Barbarism_ The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture_ is a compilation of essays written by various scholars on the various underground and occult aspects of Russian culture and later of the culture of the Soviet Union. The Bolsheviks who created the Soviet Union did much to portray Russian culture under the Tsars as backward and the Russian

peasant as illiterate and prone to superstition; however, as one sees by reading this book many individuals within the Soviet Union themselves had elaborate occult and esoteric beliefs. While the Soviet Union tried to ban writers and intellectuals and suppress all religion or "irrational" developments of the human spirit, this effort largely failed due to the very creative nature of man (so misunderstood by Marxists). Russian culture has always been influenced by surviving pagan beliefs and through the Christian tradition preserved in the Russian Orthodox Church; however, influences from freemasonry, Swedenborgianism and spiritism, Theosophy, Anthroposophy, Eastern religions, and other occultists such as Gurdjieff and his interpreter Ouspensky have also played an important role in shaping the occult underground culture in Russia. In addition, various German philosophical idealists such as Kant, Schelling, and Hegel came to play an important part in the development of Russian thought along with iconoclasts such as Nietzsche and romantics and anarchists. This book includes a brief introduction to the occult culture in Russian and Soviet thought and various essays, followed by a conclusion dealing with modern developments in Russian culture. Essays included are an essay on folk magic and divination among the Russian peasantry with emphasis on the survival of paganism and the role of the Russian Orthodox Church; an essay on the role of the peasant and the occult in Russian literature with reference to the authors Ivan Turgenev, Andrei Bely, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn; an essay on the role of the Jewish Kabbalah in Russian occultism including reference to Christian Sophiologists including the theologians Vladimir Solovyov, Pavel Florensky, and Sergei Bulgakov; an essay on the role of Satanism with emphasis on the role of Satan in the Orthodox Churches and Russian tradition as well as mention of the novels of Andrei Bely; an essay on "fashionable occultism" including reference to the Theosophical and Anthroposophical societies, spiritualism, and freemasonry; an essay on the thought of Nikolai Fedorovich Fedorov; an essay on Russian cosmism which included ideas on space exploration and immortality with reference to Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, Biocosmist and panpsychist; an essay on technology and the role of the Soviet engineer; an essay on occult socialist realism (interestingly occult ideas based upon the Christian veneration of saints were behind the Soviet action taken in preserving Lenin's body); an essay on the filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein and the role of the occult and gnosticism in his thinking; an essay on Vsevolod Ivanov; an essay on Daniil Andreev famous mystic and writer who combined world religions in what he termed "The Rose of the World"; and a concluding essay on the role of occultism in politics which mentions various Russian Rightist groups including the Traditionalist thought of Aleksandr Dugin and the role of the infamous antisemitic tract, Protocols of the Elders of Zion. In sum, this book constitutes an enormous compendium of material on various occultists, writers and groups, as well as a useful bibliography including details about various obscure journals and rare books, and will prove invaluable to the researcher in esoteric thought. Many in America are largely ignorant of the alternative belief systems which exist among the Russians and which existed under the Soviet tyranny, and hopefully this book will prove a useful tool to alleviating that ignorance. For all those interested in alternative modes of perceiving reality and in discarded belief systems, the ideas presented in this book will prove to be a fascinating look at the deep recesses of the Russian (and Soviet) psyche.

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. The Other RussiaBy Ashtar Command "The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture" is a collection of scholarly articles on exactly that subject, edited by Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (an expert on Nietzsche's influence on Russia and the Soviet Union). Like most scholarly tomes, it's a hard and somewhat boring read. The quality of the contributions vary. I read a few of them and skimmed the rest. But yes, if you are seriously interested in this rather obscure subject – at least for us outside Russia! – this volume is probably a must. If you're a more general reader, I would rather recommend Andrei Znamenski's "Red Shambhala", which concentrates on the exciting stuff. Occultism was popular, to the point of faddish, during Russia's so-called Silver Age, a period in Russian literature and culture which began around 1890 and ended shortly after the Bolshevik revolution. Theosophy, Anthroposophy and Freemasonry were all known in Russia. The Symbolist movement in poetry and theatre was influenced by occultism, including Satanism. Even the Futurists drew from occult sources – apparently, their obsession with cubes comes from Ouspensky! The bizarre ideas of Nikolai Fedorov (also spelled Fyodorov), a kind of messianic-salvific evolutionary materialism, inspired the Cosmists, a group of "materialists" really indebted to esoteric sources such as Theosophy. The Bolsheviks weren't unaffected. The "Nietzschean Marxist" Lunacharsky was prominent within a Bolshevik faction known as God-Builders, which also regrouped the famous writer Gorky, who wanted to abolish death and matter in favour of a purely spiritual-energetic existence. Some aspects of the occult heritage were suppressed after the October revolution. Many Russian Anthroposophists supported (sic) the Bolshevik revolution, and even worked with Proletkult. Despite this, Anthroposophy was declared illegal. The Communist International condemned Freemasonry, Theosophical works became inaccessible and many esotericists languished in the Gulag. Others were expelled from the country by the Bolsheviks (Berdyayev and Bulgakov comes to mind). Daniel Andreev's "The Rose of the World", a best-selling occult work during the 1990's, was originally written during the 1950's when the author was in prison for his religious views. However, other aspects of occultism survived, often in quite subtle ways. For instance, the ideas of Gorky and others about mental telepathy and its power to cause mass hysteria or subliminally influence individuals have certain similarities to the philosophy behind Social Realism, developed by none other than Gorky himself. Soviet adulation of technology as a means to create a paradise on earth, including an obsession with space travel and the abolition of death, has obvious affinities to Fedorov and the Cosmists. The Lenin cult, including the bizarre mausoleum, are clearly

quasi-religious. The cubic shape of the mausoleum is reminiscent of Ouspensky's ideas about the Fourth Dimension, the idea of embalming a dead leader evokes ancient Egypt (the source of occult knowledge according to many such groups), and Fedorov makes another guest appearance with his ideas about science literally resurrecting the dead. Several contributors to this volume speculate about similarities between Symbolist view of language and the newspeak of the Soviet era, or between Symbolist theatre and the Moscow show trials! Note also the Stalinist paranoia about "wreckers" and "foreign agents", and the pop superstition about our orderly existence being threatened by demons, witches and other malevolent forces (often unseen). It's somewhere here that the analysis gets somewhat problematic. Yes, one can indeed see parallels between occultism and certain aspects of Soviet ideology and propaganda, but one may likewise point to similarities to Christianity. At bottom, Federov's "philosophy of the common task" is a quasi-Christianity shorn of its supernatural elements, even including a physical resurrection made possible through advanced technology. The idea of "deification" prominent in the Orthodox Church can be distorted by materialists claiming that *they* can deify man and make him a "god" on earth. There are propaganda paintings of Stalin where he is surrounded by a golden aura, almost like an Orthodox saint, and his portrait was born in procession, like the icons of the Orthodox Church. But even Christianity isn't the end of it. One aspect down-played by the contributors to this volume is the similarity between Soviet worship of technology and *Western* ditto. The notion of Progress (with a capital P) has become the quasi-religion of the entire modern world. What's so special about Soviet dreams to abolish mortality, conquer space and turn men into virtual gods? Indeed, one of the contributors mentions August Comte, the founder of positivism, who also created his own humanistic religion! Comte, of course, was a French 19th century philosopher, not a Soviet propagandist... Finally, I think Arthur Versluis' work "The New Inquisitions" might be of interest to students of this material. Versluis points out that Communism and fascism have similarities to the medieval inquisitions, and that the "ideocratic meme" might be near-perennial. If so, one doesn't need to postulate a subliminal occult influence on, say, the Moscow show trials. They simply enact the same meme, which is independent from both Symbolism and Stalinism. That being said, I nevertheless believe that "The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture" is a fine study for advanced students of The Other Russia, and therefore recommend it to the more scholarly part of your private library... Four stars. 2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Very useful book. By John the book guy I would highly recommend this book to anyone who studies Russian culture. The book originated in the 1991 conference "The Occult and Modern Russian and Soviet Culture" held at Fordham University (New York, USA), and as such is a collection of essays on a variety of topics. I found the most interesting essays to be "[Nikolai] Fedorov's Transformation of the Occult" (by George M. Young Jr.), "Russian Cosmism in the 1920s and Today" (by Michael Hagemester). Students of the Silver Age would be very interested in the three essays on the occult in that period: Kristi Groberg on satanism among writers and artists of the Silver Age, Maria Carlson on "Fashionable Occultism: Spiritualism, Theosophy, Freemasonry, and Hermeticism in Fin-de-Siecle Russia," and Renata Maydell on "Anthroposophy in Russia." There is also a long and interesting essay by Mikhail Epstein on Daniil Andreev, who created his alternative religious and historical vision during the reign of Stalin.

A pioneering, richly interdisciplinary volume, this is the first work in any language on a subject that has long attracted interest in the West and is now of consuming interest in Russia itself. The cultural ferment unleashed by the collapse of the Soviet Union reawakened interest in the study of Russian religion and spirituality. This book provides a comprehensive account of the influence of occult beliefs and doctrines on intellectual and cultural life in twentieth-century Russia. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal's introduction delineates the characteristics of occult cosmology which distinguish it from mysticism and theology, and situates Russian occultism in historical and pan-European contexts. Contributors explore the varieties of occult thinking characteristic of prerevolutionary Russia, including Kabbala, theosophy, anthroposophy, and the fascination with Satanism. Other contributors document occultism in the cultural life of the early Soviet period, examine the surprising traces of the occult in the culture of the high Stalin era, and describe the occult revival in contemporary Russia. The volume includes bibliographical essays on Russian occult materials available outside Russia. Contributors: Mikhail Agursky, Hebrew University; Valentina Brougher, Georgetown University; Maria Carlson, University of Kansas; Robert Davis, New York Public Library; Mikhail Epstein, Emory University; Kristi Groberg, North Dakota State University; Irina Gutkin, UCLA; Michael Hagemester, Ruhr University, Bochum; Linda Ivanits, Pennsylvania State University; Edward Kasinec, New York Public Library; Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, University of Wisconsin; Hakan Lövgren, Independent Scholar; Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, Fordham University; William F. Ryan, Warburg Institute, London; Holly Denio Stephens, University of Kansas; Anthony Vanchu, University of Texas, Austin; Renata Von Maydell, Munich University; George Young, Independent Scholar

"This book succeeds in making a strong case for a relatively widespread fad for occult works in pre- and post-industrial Russia. . . . This rich, diverse collection of essays makes an enormous contribution to our understanding of the cultural history of late imperial and Soviet Russia. After reading this book, it will be impossible to approach the thinkers and writers of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries without taking into account the prevalence of

mystical and occultist strains of thought."?Valerie A. Kivelson, *The Russian "Casting a rather wide net, the essays in this book succeed in documenting an amazing array of occult or occult-like ideas and practices, not only during the symbolist age, but also in the seemingly rational, materialist, and antisuperstitious Soviet period. In this sense, the book offers a contribution to the ongoing reevaluation of the relationship between modernist and Stalinist culture. . . . The main intention of this collection, according to Rosenthal, was 'to raise new issues for research and discussion.' The book certainly fulfills this purpose admirably."?Adrian Wanner, *Slavic "A valuable contribution toward a deeper understanding of the intellectual atmosphere in which Communism developed."?Shoshana Keller, H-Net s"A fascinating exploration of occult themes in Russian culture, from turn-of-the-century modernism to the post-Communist scene, not excluding the nooks and crannies of the Soviet period. Admirable for its range and scholarly detail."?Laura Engelstein, Princeton University**