

# NATIONALITIES PAPERS

(Special Issue)

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**Pamyat**

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*A Semi-Annual Publication  
of the*

ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF  
THE NATIONALITIES OF THE USSR  
AND EASTERN EUROPE

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FALL 1991  
VOLUME XIX/NUMBER 2

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*Nationalities Papers* is published semi-annually (Spring and Fall) by the Association for the Study of the Nationalities of the USSR and Eastern Europe (ASN) with the support of the Simon H. Rifkind Center for the Humanities of the Division of Humanities of The City College of New York, and a grant from the Shevchenko Scientific Society in America.

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Typesetting by ΣΚΑΤΟΚΕΦΑΛΟΣ Publishing, New York, New York, U.S.A.

Printed by Book Crafters, Inc., Chelsea, Michigan 48118, U.S.A.

ISSN 0090-5992

LC 73-6414344

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## EDITORIAL NOTE

### “Opening Pandora’s Box?”

The decision to devote an entire issue exclusively to the phenomenon of Pamyat calls for an explanation if not for an apologia beyond the fact that *Nationalities Papers* has recently received a surprising number of manuscripts on this subject.

For the past few years, Pamyat has generated enthusiastic support as well as bitter and dissonant opposition, both of them spilling over into verbal and physical violence. Though, technically speaking, predating the era of glasnost, the movement (if it can be called such) has nevertheless been associated with Gorbachev’s policy of tolerating greater public expression of diverse views in the Soviet Union. In its short lifespan, Pamyat’s adherents have managed to command considerable attention, more often than not polarizing those debating and disputing its merits and faults. This public divisiveness over Pamyat has its counterpart in the academic community, where views range from outright polemical condemnations (ascribing it beyond the pale of intellectual concern) to near partisan assessment of the centrality of some of Pamyat’s agenda to mainstream Russian nationalism.

Pamyat’s overt antisemitism repels some but is deemphasized by others. Its ethnocentric call for a return to a Russian past appeals both to xenophobic Russian nationalists as well as those longing nostalgically for a simpler life based on familiar, long-neglected cultural traditions. On the one hand Pamyat’s followers preach a seemingly persuasive and genuine antisovietism; on the other, Pamyat’s self-appointed spokesmen unabashedly promote a sense of Russian messianism, thereby raising suspicions of harboring sympathies for conservative anti-glasnost factions. While recognizing (somewhat patronizingly) the rights of other Soviet nationalities, Pamyat’s pro-Russian doctrines also tend to encourage an extreme russocentric sense of superiority and paternalism vis-à-vis the non-Russians in the USSR.

What is one to make of the hodge-podge “platforms” of this fractured “movement” lacking coherent organizational structure and “represented” by vocal demagogic leaders? How is one to assess a group with few members but countless sympathizers? Where does one relegate Pamyat on the spectrum of Russian nationalism in the light of its abysmal failure at the polls? Does it indeed hold a legitimate place within the range of dialogues conducted throughout the Soviet

Union? Does it deserve academic attention?

That its fundamental dicta have potential bearing on the future character of Russian nationalism and on the relations between Russians and non-Russians is undeniable. Nevertheless, is Pamyat worthy of scholarly research? Or ought it to be ignored, undeserving of lengthy discussion? Is it a fringe phenomenon, a one-time flicker on the radar detector focused on today's Soviet Union in flux, or is its message an ominous portent of the future, a latter-day *Mein Kampf* with terrible implications? Is it an integral member of the chorus debating the Soviet Union's future, or does it lack authenticity? Is it, as some claim, a creature of the KGB, or does it possess a separate identity regardless of its associations?

Some of these questions are raised and answered by the authors in this issue of *Nationalities Papers*. There is little unanimity among them except for a common consensus that Pamyat is sufficiently important to warrant scholarly investigation: 1) to clarify its message (see John Garrard's translation of and comments on a Pamyat Manifesto); 2) to locate it within the spectrum of Russian nationalist ideologies (John Dunlop); 3) to grapple with its judeomania (John Klier); 4) to spell out its diffuse activist program (Paul Midford); 5) to assess one liberal Soviet publication's strategy in response to Pamyat's inflammatory message (Garrard); and, 6) to make a case for Pamyat's legitimacy within the goals of perestroika (Krasnov).

In producing this issue, *Nationalities Papers* hopes to provide students and scholars with an opportunity to respond, in the form of substantive letters or articles, to contribute their understanding of Pamyat or present critiques of individual articles, items we hope to publish in another issue.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Association of the Study of Nationalities and the Editorial staff of *Nationalities Papers* wishes to acknowledge the generous support of Herbert Robinson, Esq., a member of the Class of 1937 of the City College of New York, for making possible this enlarged issue of the journal. *Nationalities Papers* wishes to express its gratitude to Robert Monyak for helping to shepherd this issue through its several stages of production. His keen eye and professional grasp of the material have earned him the right to be recognized as the assistant editor of this issue.

*Nationalities Papers* is especially grateful to the John M. Olin Foundation for covering production and mailing costs of several hundred copies of this issue sent to scholars and libraries in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.