



Krista Berglund

# The Vexing Case of Igor Shafarevich, a Russian Political Thinker

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ISBN 978-3-0348-0214-7      e-ISBN 978-3-0348-0215-4  
DOI 10.1007/978-3-0348-0215-4

Library of Congress Control Number: 2011942748

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# Acknowledgements

I thank the Foundations of the University of Helsinki, The Finnish Cultural Foundation, the Finnish Graduate School of Political Science and International Relations, Alfred Kordelin Foundation, the Finnish Graduate School for Russian and East European Studies, Oskar Öflund Foundation, the Network of European Studies of the University of Helsinki and the Kone Foundation for having financed this study, for having been patient with me and for having given me time to think. This is a big luxury nowadays and I am very grateful. I am also grateful to the bilateral exchange programme of the University of Helsinki with Moscow University as well as the libraries of Memorial and Russkoe zarubezhe in Moscow, Open Society Archives in Budapest and, most of all, the Slavonic Library of the Finnish National Library with its unique staff. Finally I owe gratitude both to the Department of Politics and Economy and the Catherine Institute of the University of Helsinki where it has always been a joy working.

There are many friends and colleagues whom I owe much for their friendship, help, support and advice. The first of them is Marjaana Hakala. I also want to thank Kaarina Aitamurto, Milla Bergström, Andrei Borisov, Jovan Čulibrk, Dragana Cvetanović, Ulla Hakanen, Martti Haltia, Milla Hannula, Meri Herrala, Anne-Maria Holli, Elina Ihamäki, Susan Ikonen, Elina Kahla, Johanna Kantola, Pekka Kauppala, Marja Keränen, Milena Koroleva, Viktor Kott, Elina and Janne Kylliäinen, Maija Könönen, Teuvo Laitila, Tuija Lattunen, Simo Leisti, Harri Liuksiala, Iraiida Lukka-de Groot, Anita Martinez, Anna Nikolaeva, Juhani Nuorluoto, Vesa Oittinen, Larisa Orfinskaia, Oili Pulkkinen, Katja Ruutu, Anu Rämä, Päivi Salmesvuori, Aleksandra Skopets, Edda and Satu Sundström, Vasileios Syros, Ivanka Tasić, Maija Turunen, Marina Vitukhnovskaia-Kauppala, Henri Vogt, Risto Wallin and Hanna Wass. Sergei Smetanin and the other regular members of the now-defunct Solzhenitsyn forum in Yandex offered extremely stimulating discussions of the highest expertise and greatest insight.

Helmut Koch and Timo Vihavainen as well as Andrew Blane, Walter Dietrich, Igor Dolgachev, Edward E. Ericson Jr., Jarmo Eronen, Vilho Harle, Alexis Klimoff, Daniel J. Mahoney, Hannu Niemi, Jean-Pierre Serre and Dan Ungurianu have been

very kind and supportive in many ways. I am also thankful to Philip Boobbyer, Robert Hickson, Edward Kline, Larry Shepp, Iurii Tabak and Andrei Znamenskii for having kindly answered my questions. The help from Miles Reid who let me explore his Shafarevich files and from Sergei Demushkin who saw to it that I received a long-lost article by Shafarevich was invaluable.

I am very grateful to Anna Mätzener of Birkhäuser, my kind editor, and the similarly kind Clemens Heine, my first contact at Springer.

It is a joy and an honour to dedicate this study to, as the Russians would say so beautifully, the luminous memory of Timo Veijola, the late professor of Old Testament studies of the University of Helsinki.

Finally I want to thank Igor Shafarevich for being such an exciting and challenging research subject.

# A Note on Transliteration

In this study Russian names and words are transliterated according to the Library of Congress System (omitting the apostrophes for *ь* and *ъ* as well as diacritics).

Except for the names of Russian emperors or saints, which are written in their English forms according to general practice, I transliterate all names which were originally written in Cyrillic (such as Genrikh Neigauz or Nadezhda Mandelshtam), thus doing so with the names of all emigrants as well. This is certainly somewhat problematic (but I hope, not offensive) because some emigrants transliterate their names according to some other system (such as Ludmilla Alexeyeva, Joseph Brodsky, Alexander Yanov or Yuri Slezkine, whose names will be transliterated here as Liudmila Alekseeva, Iosif Brodskii, Aleksandr Ianov and Iurii Slezkin). My rationale for this practice is that a great number of the emigrants who figure in this study are mentioned both when referring to their activities in the Soviet Union before their emigration or as authors of Russian-language texts and when referring to them as authors of texts in English or other languages using Latin alphabet after emigration. Many of them have additionally used several spellings of their names when writing in languages using the Latin alphabet. However, whenever mentioning a person for the first time, the alternative form(s) of his name is (/are) given in square brackets.

Names of Russian (or Slavic) origin, which were given to the person in question in the Latinised form (among them Noam Chomsky, Alexis Klimoff or Catharine Theimer Nepomnyashchy) have not been altered.

When quoting an English-language source, the original's transliteration has not been altered. Thus, while I write the name of the former Russian President as Eltsin, occasionally it may appear in such forms as Yeltsin or El'tsin as well. Further variation in the footnotes is due to bibliographical references because, for instance, I write both about Iurii Slezkin's ideas and refer to Slezkine 2004.





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# Chapter 1

## Igor Shafarevich, a Lightning Rod for Controversy

### What Has Been Said About Shafarevich?

This is a study of the political and philosophical thought and social activity of the academician Igor Shafarevich, a world-renowned Russian mathematician. During the Brezhnev years Shafarevich was noted for his work in a dissidents' independent human rights committee alongside Andrei Sakharov, surely the best-known human rights activist of the Soviet Union. He was also the closest associate of the other leading figure of the Soviet dissident world, the anti-communist writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn whose contribution to the shattering of the Soviet system was probably bigger than that of any other dissident.<sup>1</sup>

All the same, outside the sphere of mathematics Shafarevich's greatest fame, or notoriety, is due to his old manuscript *Russophobia* which was published, initially without his knowledge, in 1988. During the years to come *Russophobia* was condemned in many dozens of articles on authoritative forums in the Soviet Union/Russia as well as in the West. So far known as a human rights champion, Shafarevich was now written off as an anti-Semite and a dangerous Russian nationalist. The "*Russophobia* scandal" culminated when over six hundred mathematicians worldwide signed open letters deprecating him, and when the US National Academy of Sciences pleaded with Shafarevich to resign.

In the 1990s and during the first decade of the 2000s Shafarevich authored dozens of articles, commented on daily politics and took part in political, social, and cultural enterprises.

Authoritative scholars of Russian intellectual history, reputed journalists and other literary notables have assessed Shafarevich and his ideas before me. It is thus interesting to hear first what has been said about him. The following sample consists

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of clarity and simplicity, I will use "dissident" in this study in its general meaning, ignoring the fact that not all dissidents – among them Shafarevich and Solzhenitsyn – were very comfortable with some political connotations attached to this name over the years.



of assessments which either aim to encapsulate his ideological development in its entirety or to nail down something essential about his person. At this point I refrain from making comments on the substance of these assessments. Even unambiguous factual mistakes are not yet corrected.

Cécile Vaissié is the author of a comprehensive history of the dissidents of the Soviet Union (or, as Vaissié puts it – Russia) from the 1960s onwards. This is how she introduces Shafarevich:

This brilliant mathematician, born in the Ukraine to a family of Jewish origin, became a professor of Moscow University and a corresponding member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences in the 1950s. In May 1971 he joins Andrei Sakharov's Committee for human rights. At the time he is not an anti-Semite, but this is what he will become during the 1970s.<sup>2</sup>

John B. Dunlop of the Hoover Institution is a prestigious and experienced specialist in contemporary Russian intellectual history. In an article dedicated to Shafarevich, Dunlop assesses him as follows: "From being a moderate nationalist in the Solzhenitsyn mould, Shafarevich gradually evolved during the late 1970s towards more extreme positions." Dunlop continues that

The remainder of Shafarevich's biography after 1981 [when Shafarevich completed his *Russophobia*] may be recounted fairly briefly. The author of 'Russophobia' had set out, apparently irreversibly, upon an extremist path. Shafarevich's words and actions during the *perestroika* and post-Gorbachev periods have confirmed that fact. The erstwhile dissident and human rights activist has now effectively become indistinguishable from a host of other shrill right-wing Russian nationalists.<sup>3</sup>

The decline and moral collapse of a gifted mathematician and human and religious rights activist elicits, above all, feelings of regret.<sup>4</sup>

Adam Michnik, a noted Polish intellectual and the editor-in-chief of Poland's second largest daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*, informed in 1990 the readers of *The New York Review of Books* that

[The type of anti-communism] advocated by Igor Shafarevich [. . .] is xenophobic, authoritarian, turned toward the past and toward restoring the life of the past. This [. . .] type [. . .] is distinguished most tellingly by its reluctance to do away with the figure of Stalin, because he was the founder of the Great Russian empire. Dictatorship, according to this view, should not be abolished but should rather be continued in a different form.<sup>5</sup>

Then, David Remnick, the editor of *The New Yorker* and the former Moscow correspondent of *The Washington Post*, writes in his Pulitzer-winning *Lenin's Tomb*:

Igor Shafarevich, a world-renowned mathematician who joined both Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn in the seventies in a number of dissident causes, turned out to be one of the

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<sup>2</sup> Vaissié 1999, 186.

<sup>3</sup> Dunlop 1994, 28–29.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>5</sup> Michnik 1990.

most dangerous of the intellectual anti-Semites. [...] I visited Shafarevich one evening at his apartment on Leninsky Prospekt. He eyed me suspiciously and denied he was an anti-Semite. His enormous hound circled the floor of the study, never stopping. Such accusations, he said, were the result of the Jewish 'persecution-mania'.<sup>6</sup>

The next account is authored by Masha Gessen, a journalist, editor and translator who has worked as the chief correspondent of the journal *Itogi* and contributed regularly to *The New Republic*. She emigrated from the Soviet Union to the United States in her teens, but has lived in Moscow since 1991. Gessen recounts that:

The truth is, I had to lie to interview him. At first I tried to be upfront about it. In the winter of 1995 at Moscow's opulent House of the Scholars [...] I approached Igor Shafarevich following the première of his new film, a sort of cinelecture on Russian history. I said I wanted to interview him for an American magazine. From his very impressive height, Shafarevich looked down his nose at mine. Mine, in the extensive Russian vocabulary of ethnic signifiers, screams 'Jewish.' He said no interview, ever. To end the conversation, he lumbered off the stage and literally ran down the chandelier-lit hall.

Over the preceding years Doctor Shafarevich, a mathematician cum political philosopher, had spent much time denying he was an anti-Semite. Giving him the benefit of the doubt, I asked a colleague to call and ask to interview him for a German magazine. Shafarevich cheerily invited her to his home. I wrote down all my questions, prepped the lucky interviewer, and went along posing as the photographer.

Of course, I reasoned, he could be just anti-American. Either way, he was a man of his time. Rather, at seventy-one, having lived through several distinct epochs in the history of his country, he was a man of his many times. What seemed uncanny was his relationship to his eras: in every period he had stood in the intellectual forefront of an important social trend. He had been a precocious scholar in the 1950s, a dissident in the 1970s, and a nationalist in the 1990s. In every incarnation he reached sufficient prominence to become not merely a product but a symbol of his time. In the mid-1990s he had once again positioned himself as an authority in an influential school of thought: the ultra-nationalist philosophy that was spreading steadily leftward of the far right honored him as its guru.<sup>7</sup>

Further, Peter Reddaway, the former director of the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies in Washington and the author of numerous studies on Russian and Soviet intellectual and political history, and Dmitrii Glinskii [Dmitri Glinski], a senior research associate at the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of World Economy and International Relations in Moscow, state in their brief analysis of Shafarevich's thought that "Shafarevich's writings deserve serious attention as the most thorough exposition of mainstream national-conservative ideology as it has survived, with minor adjustments, until the present day."<sup>8</sup>

The characterisation by Mikhail Antonov, a political writer who has taken part in various opposition movements since the perestroika years is somewhat similar. He opened his rebuttal of one of Shafarevich's articles in the stark anti-Eltsin and anti-Western weekly *Duel* in 1999 with: "Shafarevich is today the major ideologue of the non-communist (or it would be more precise to say 'anti-communist') 'Russian

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<sup>6</sup> Remnick 1994, 87.

<sup>7</sup> Gessen 1997, 35–36.

<sup>8</sup> Reddaway & Glinski 2001, 107.

patriotic movement', which usually takes his articles as its programmatic documents."<sup>9</sup> Another encapsulation – by the Russian anthropologist Andrei A. Znamenskii [Znamenski] now living in America – goes along the same lines:

[Shafarevich] was the first major Russian nationalist ideologist who started to speak up in the beginning of Perestroika, while others still wrapped their ideas into pseudo-socialist clothing. [...] His calm demeanor definitely sets him apart from such annoying demagogues as Zhirinovskiy or Prokhanov. Though he contributes to a number of nationalist initiatives, Shafarevich still avoids zealous political activities, his role is mostly ideological.<sup>10</sup>

Unlike the other characterisations here, that by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Shafarevich's old companion and a world-famous writer, dates from the 1970s. These are Solzhenitsyn's words in his literary memoirs *And the Calf Butted the Oaktree*:<sup>11</sup>

All of us are made of warm flesh, none are of iron. The first steps (particularly the first ones) on the path of ripening to danger and then, sacrifice, are not easy for anybody, not anybody. Here in Russia we have two thousand people of worldwide renown, many of them much more loudly acclaimed than Shafarevich (mathematicians roam on earth in feeble scantiness), but because of their cowardice they are all ciphers as citizens. Only a dozen of them have risen to stand straight – risen and grown into trees, among them Shafarevich. I happened – yet not so often, not so thoroughly – to observe this noiseless growth of the trunk of his citizenship. [...]

For somebody who has got an education other than humanistic, entering the sphere of civic life denotes not merely growth of courage but also a turn in the whole of awareness and attention, a new profession at a mature age, application of intellect to a field neglected by others (whether then neglecting one's own field as in the case of many, or *not* neglecting it, as in the case of the doubly staunch Shafarevich who remains, to this day, an active and productive mathematician of world class). When such cases are superficial, we get diletantism, when they are successful, we observe a strong, vigorous grip by original minds: they are not packed with slogans drawn from presumptions; they critically sift the wheat from the chaff. [...]

What is more, Shafarevich is from birth inseparably tied to the Russian land and history; they are one flesh, with a common bloodstream, a single heartbeat. His love for Russia is little short of jealous – so as to pay back the earlier negligence of our generation? And his quest to use his hands and head to requite his country in a way worthy of this love is genuine. Among the contemporary Soviet intelligentsia I have rarely met anyone like him in his readiness to rather die in the homeland for its sake than to find salvation in the West. The strength and unassailability of this sentiment said: over the ocean joy is strange, here sorrow is our own.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Antonov 1999.

<sup>10</sup> Znamenski 1996, 45–46.

<sup>11</sup> While there is an English translation of these memoirs by Harry Willetts, *The Oak and the Calf*, here and further in the text the citations from these memoirs do not follow it. This is because Willetts's translation, despite its merits, makes Solzhenitsyn sound "tamer" than in the Russian original, which is a shame in the case of a writer of stylistic virtuosity and originality like him. However, I have included the page numbers of Willetts's translation in square brackets after the actual citation.

<sup>12</sup> Solzhenitsyn 1975, 433–434 [English: 405–406].

Boris Paramonov, then, is a reputed essayist in Russian social and literary criticism. Since his emigration from the Soviet Union in 1979 he has regularly contributed to noted Russian-language periodicals and *Radio Liberty*, occasionally also to studies on contemporary Russian culture and society. In an essay *Shit* Paramonov describes Shafarevich as a *pochvennik*<sup>13</sup> – something that “bears evidence of an infantile character” and, as Paramonov explains at length, obsession with faeces. There is also another aspect to it: “The overestimation of the *pochva* [the soil] reflects a persisting inclination to incest (not in the unequivocally sexual sense of Freud’s but rather, in the broad cultural context of Fromm).”

Paramonov informs his readers that Shafarevich “has written two books that contradict each other, *Socialism as a Phenomenon of World History* and *Russophobia*, [a matter which] witnesses to diametrically opposite psychic experiences, to ambivalence of the soul” and “the unresolvedness of an infantile conflict.” Paramonov explains this with a reference to Freud: “In psychoanalysis it is called a projection of the maternal womb.” This “ambivalence of the soul” has to do with “Shafarevich’s morbid dislike of emigrants – people who have dared to be born, break out, cut their umbilical cord”. Thus, “in Shafarevich’s subconsciousness beating of children is taking place.” Paramonov concludes: “Shafarevich is a person who still needs to be born.”<sup>14</sup>

The next introductory piece on Shafarevich is by Vladimir Bondarenko. He has worked as literary and theatre critic and head of the literary section of two prestigious Moscow theatres *Malyi teatr* and *MKhAT*. Nowadays Bondarenko is best remembered as the co-founder of the controversial Moscow daily *Den* in 1990. He remains deputy editor of *Zavtra*, its successor.<sup>15</sup> In 1998, on the occasion of Shafarevich’s 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, Bondarenko wrote in *Zavtra*:

Since childhood, with his immense talent [Shafarevich] has been committed to a fate, not a biography. The rarest mathematical gift. Some say that if the Nobel Prize was awarded in mathematics, it would definitely be given to Igor Shafarevich. Although even without it he has enough prizes – from the Lenin Prize to the most notable international ones. He is a member of many Academies. And everywhere at various times he ends up being an undesired laureate. First, in the Soviet Union they gave him the Lenin Prize, and then did not know how to live with it when Igor Rostislavovich began to make harsh anti-governmental statements in the 1970s. . . The dissidents wanted to bring him closer to themselves, but there was no more room for a splendid spokesman of Russianness, Orthodoxy, national rebirth.

<sup>13</sup> Wayne Dowler’s translations for *pochvennichestvo*, the ideology of the *pochvenniks*, are “the native soil movement” and “native soil conservatism” (Dowler 1982, 11). *Pochvennik* was a coinage by Dostoevskii, who tried to build a bridge between the quarrelling Zapadniks, or the Westernisers, and the Slavophiles, who drew on the ideas of Russia and the Slavic East (see Dostoevskii 1992 [1880], 130–146).

<sup>14</sup> Paramonov 1997 [1991], 305–307.

<sup>15</sup> Brezhnev 1997; Bondarenko, Vladimir.

Bondarenko continues: “For the compilation *From Under the Rubble* they [i.e., the Soviets] hoped to remove him from the Soviet Academy; the democrats of the American Academy wished to oust him because of *Russophobia*.”

He argues that

in truth, in the 1970s, the 1980s, as well as the present – such disgraceful – years, Igor Rostislavovich defends the very same national interests of his country and his people. He has been neither red nor white, he feels he is a Russian patriot, and does not want to be anything else.

Bondarenko cites Aleksandr Prokhanov, *Zavtra*’s editor, who wrote a travel account of a journey by several political personalities to Transnistria in 1992:<sup>16</sup>

Igor Shafarevich amazed us. An intellectual, a scholar with a world-class reputation, no longer a young man. He walked on a bridge that was being fired at, without crouching in the face of the bullets. Thus he expressed his feeling of responsibility to defend Russia, the Russian people. At that moment he was alone with the Cossacks who were fighting at Bendery, with the home reserves of Transnistria. . . And we marvelled at him.

Shedding more light on the personality of Shafarevich, Bondarenko adds:

It is astonishing how under the circumstances of repression during the Soviet period and repression after *Russophobia* Igor Rostislavovich remains such a delicate, polite, peaceful, sensitive person. Sensitive to ideas, to books, to people. He has principle, but no orthodoxy [*ortodoksalnost*, i.e., dogmatism]. He always has living thought.

Further:

Igor Rostislavovich does not draw people to himself by hobnobbing. One finds in him, rather, intelligence, delicacy, acumen, and respectfulness even towards his opponents. But he has principle, and a certain sharpness; he never stoops to greeting people whom he finds displeasing out of submissiveness as others do. He leaves gatherings of the highest rank as a sign of protest should someone in his presence affront people and historical values dear to him. This has happened more than once. He is always ready to defend valiantly the ideas dear to him. He will fight for friends to the end. And this has happened more than once.

Finally, Bondarenko writes about Shafarevich’s standing in Russian society that

Igor Shafarevich’s *Russophobia* has since engendered hundreds of new works, exploring its theme. [. . .] As has been said, we have all come from Gogol’s *Overcoat*.<sup>17</sup> Similarly the patriotic writing of recent decades leans on the classic work of Shafarevich. [. . .] A stream of insults in the address of the internationally reputed mathematician was splashed about by absolutely all the so-called democratic publications, not only in Russia but also in the so-called democratic world. It had, in fact, universal resonance. I think there is no blacklist of democrats which would not have the name of Igor Shafarevich next to those of Dostoevskii and Rozanov for a long time to come.

<sup>16</sup> An armed conflict between Transnistria, a breakaway region of Moldova, and the rest of Moldova, the successor of the former Soviet Republic of Moldavia, broke out in 1992 when the Transnistrians claimed independence after plans to reunite Moldova with Romania had been mooted. The population of Transnistria is of mostly Russian and Ukrainian origin, but even those of Moldovan origin have tended to support sovereignty.

<sup>17</sup> A reference to Dostoevskii’s famous expression.

On the other hand, it is hard to evaluate how much this work evoked the Russian spirit of millions of our compatriots, how many young talents felt they were Russians, how easy it became for other Russian writers, publicists, and historians to start with the new beginning provided by Shafarevich.<sup>18</sup>

This introductory round culminates in the words of Aleksandr Ianov [Alexander Yanov], who has acted as professor of history and politics at the University of California, Berkeley, the University of Michigan, and the City University of New York. He is the author of several influential studies on Russian nationalism and the Russian new right – a concept which he introduced to the scholarly community back in the 1970s. Ianov worked as a political writer in Moscow until his emigration in 1974.

In his 1995 book, in a chapter *The Personal War of Professor Shafarevich* Ianov writes:

Let us start, as customary, with a portrait. As far as I can judge, having read not only everything by Shafarevich, but also, it seems, everything about Shafarevich, the most exact depiction is from the pen of Grigorii Baklanov: ‘Important was not only what he said, but how he said it – his face at that moment.<sup>19</sup> It was the face of a person sick with hatred; it burned him; it glared from the screen. Pale, distorted, jacket askew, having slipped down from the other shoulder; hatred was such that even his look seemed occasionally mad.’

Having reproduced this quotation from Baklanov, Ianov confirms: “this visual image corresponds exactly to the essence of the character.” Ianov also explains to his readers

the psychological driving force of [Shafarevich’s] character. Like Marxism, which he detests, it is triune, and its images are ambition [elsewhere in the article specified as ‘enormous, morbid ambition’ and ‘diabolical ambition’<sup>20</sup>], hatred and cowardice.

He clarifies:

I saw Igor Rostislavovich Shafarevich only on television. He did not want to meet me in order to speak about the future of Russia. Prokhanov agreed. And Kurginian too. Even Sergei Baburin did not evade an encounter. Even Ziuganov. Even Zhirinovskii. Only Shafarevich refused. I do not know why. Perhaps I embody to him everything that he detests in this world: non-conformism, Jews, America, the West. [...] Nevertheless, I think that he refused to meet me for an entirely different reason. He just very simply got scared. Our discussion was supposed to be recorded on tape, and it was clear in advance that it would not be an interview but a dialogue. An intellectual tournament in which, if need be,

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<sup>18</sup> All citations, Bondarenko 1998.

<sup>19</sup> Ianov does not specify “that moment”. In the original Baklanov is referring to an occasion when Shafarevich was speaking about the misfortunes Gorbachev and Eltsin had brought to Russia (Baklanov 1992, 46).

<sup>20</sup> This powerful excerpt deserves to be cited: “Imagine yourself, reader, for a moment in Shafarevich’s place. You are a great, respected scientist – and at the same time, a frenzied anti-Semite. On top of that you are diabolically ambitious. You dream terribly much about rising above everyone, and the best thing in the reservoir for this is anti-Semitism.”

one could also lose. Back off before the arguments and logic of the opponent. This is why it seems to me Shafarevich got cold feet.

Ianov concludes: “Moscow liberals would probably not agree with me. To them he appears as a person full of hatred; harsh, unsentimental, ascetic; claiming the role of a prophet.”<sup>21</sup>

To sum up, this variety of views of Igor Shafarevich would seem to make it quite difficult to say something indisputable about the sort of a person or thinker he is. Almost the only unchallengeable fact is that he engenders staggeringly stark emotions. Even the most buttoned-up scholarly assessment of him is hardly luke-warm or lackadaisical. He is despised, even hated but, along with that, admired, praised, and passionately defended. He is regarded as singularly dangerous or exceptionally brilliant, or both. He is depicted as an independent, individualist thinker but also as a representative or even a leading figure of one trend or another. There is no agreement on whether his ideas have undergone profound changes over the years or whether he has remained exceptionally solid in his convictions.

It may be noted, too, that all the above commentators cannot easily be located in particular ideological camps, many of them having both agreed and disagreed among themselves. Ianov and Dunlop have often been openly critical of each other’s works. Paramonov and Ianov launched into a fierce debate on Russian nationalism on Paramonov’s initiative back in the late 1970s.<sup>22</sup> Reddaway and Dunlop have enjoyed consensual and respectful scholarly relations and not seldom collaborated, and so on.

The confusingly low level of consensus on Shafarevich together with the fact that opinions about him are nevertheless stark, makes this a subject susceptible to misunderstanding and controversy. Saying something about Shafarevich would seem to imply taking a stance towards a host of other issues as well. In this study, I try to find out what Shafarevich actually says and thinks, and why he has attracted such attention and engendered such strong emotions.

## Why Is It Important to Get Shafarevich Right?

It is my basic claim that in contemporary (scholarly) discourse Shafarevich is far too often seen from a perspective too narrow, neglecting the arguments which he himself considers the most essential. I suggest that his words and deeds are frequently interpreted in ways which have little to do with his own intentions. I further argue that it is vital to get him right; mishearing, misinterpreting and mistaking him for something he is not is counterproductive, and not merely for the sake of fairness towards Shafarevich. The broader conversations in which he is

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<sup>21</sup> All citations, Ianov 1995, 191–193.

<sup>22</sup> Paramonov 1979; Ianov 1980a. For a survey of the debate (and sharp criticism on Ianov), see Dunlop 1983, 280–281.

involved concern central issues in the relations between Russia and the West. Nurturing illusory conceptions about Shafarevich may thus be symptomatic of other kinds of misunderstanding.

A central principle of the study is that Shafarevich is “presumed innocent until proved guilty”. Even if he has been chosen to be heard partly because it has not seldom been alleged that he is a nationalist extremist, anti-Semite, hostile towards contemporary Western democracy and so forth, none of these charges will be accepted as premises of the study, or as ready arguments. Any glowing assessments about Shafarevich – there are plenty of this kind, as well – will not do as premises either. The same principle must naturally also concern others “heard” in the study.

Without an attempt to hold on to this basic line, the study would be not much more than labelling. Its results could be disputed *ad infinitum*, but they would hardly be meaningful. It would be like trench warfare in which the major task is to defend one’s own results and to hold back competing interpretations. Instead, meaningful research resembles confrontation – or, to put it in less bellicose language, an encounter. Its stakes and risks are greater but, if it is successful, it can resolve deadlocks, provide new views on old problems and open up new challenges underlying the conventional terminology. In the same vein, such concepts as “democracy”, “conservatism”, “reform”, and “patriotism” are best treated as approximations and tools for comprehension; signposts halfway to understanding but not its termini, beyond which there is no way to go.

I further hope that it becomes maximally hard to dismiss the challenges of Shafarevich’s ideas because I concentrate on him alone. In many contemporary studies Russian conservatives, nationalists, and patriots (or however they are characterised) are dealt with *en masse*. This approach can certainly provide a general overview but it is also liable to over-emphasising uniformity and producing generalisations according to the lowest common denominator, even caricatures. This occurs particularly easily when studying the phenomena of nationalism and ideologies of the new right, which are – and far from always without reason – perceived as precarious. It seems most natural to highlight what looks suspicious or potentially dangerous, or simply appears strangest to the Western eye.

This tendency is further encouraged by the fact that contemporary Western scholars are under considerable pressure not to be sympathetic of anything that could be perceived as discriminatory or undemocratic. At worst this may result in a researcher’s alacrity to compensate lack of thorough research by resorting to labels such as “extremist” or “reactionary” just for the sake of being on the safe side. In the sphere of Russian studies there is the additional difficulty that it has traditionally been typical to highlight the unique, “incommensurable” nature of Russia rather than to look for common denominators and generalities as is the case in social sciences.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Pursiainen 1998, 3, 4, 5, 58.



Among the vexing themes that arise in a study about Shafarevich are the images and self-identifications of Russia as related to the West, traditionalism, conservatism, radicalism and socialism in the past and present of Russia and the West, age-old philosophical disputes about organic analogies of society and their implications, nationality issues such as the Jewish and Russian questions, the nature of contemporary techno-scientific civilisation, the role of Orthodox Christianity in Russia's history and, related to all these issues, the rows over them among Soviet dissidents, emigrants, Russian scholars in the West and, later, political groups active during the perestroika years and beyond.

The next section of this chapter lays the methodological foundation for the study by outlining the method of history of ideas. Lastly, some words will be said about my sources and bibliography.

## **The Guidelines of the Research of History of Ideas**

The person of Igor Shafarevich and the discourses concerning him are, indeed, full of controversies that easily lead to (irrational) emotional outbursts and the “trench warfare” of preconceived views. Fitting methodological tools are needed to outflank this danger and to “cool off” the premises of the study so that predefined impressions or prejudices will not creep in. The method of history of ideas seems appropriate for this purpose. It primes one for reading ideological texts without misconstruing their own ends, assessing them in relation to the world around them and, eventually, engaging with them in an unbiased dialogue that is meaningful to both parties. Thus, the advice of specialists on the history of ideas method will now be considered for the purposes of listening to Shafarevich and other “respondents” and “informants” – all those who will be heard and consulted in one way or another – in a fair and reasonable way.

As in most scholarly fields, sinking into the swamp of pieces of methodological advice is easy, since the discipline of the history of ideas, too, has a wide literature dedicated to methodological disputes. Here “the method of history of ideas” refers mainly to the methodological observations by R. G. Collingwood, the renowned philosopher of history, who is often considered the father of the history of ideas method, and Quentin Skinner, who has further developed Collingwood's ideas and greatly contributed to the study of intellectual history and political philosophy.

I will also take into account observations on the historical-critical method by biblical exegetes. After all, biblical studies is one of the most developed disciplines dealing with ideological texts and their interpretation. Its methodological toolkit is loaded with cautions about anachronistic or otherwise arbitrarily predefined points of departure when studying texts. Incidentally, when the time comes to turn to

Shafarevich's *Russophobia*, the substantial expertise of biblical studies will also come in handy.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, to my mind the best definition of any research of ideological texts is of the pen of two biblical scholars, Timo Veijola and Ville Riekkinen. They simply define it as a dialogical relationship between the text studied and its student. While, however, "the text is unquestionably in the worse position of these two parties to the dialogue", the main difficulty is more often than not about guaranteeing the text a chance to defend itself against an arbitrary interpreter and his preconceptions. These two scholars further stress that the text is able neither to improve its expressions nor to transmit information about its origins essential to correct understanding.<sup>25</sup> In the case of Shafarevich, whose mere name stirs passionate reactions, such a warning seems proper.

Riekkinen's and Veijola's definition expresses well that a researcher should familiarise himself thoroughly with the formulations and expressions of the text as well as acquire information about the world in which it was written – to get acquainted with its context. Occasionally, however, historians of ideas settle in either one of these two camps, that of "contextual orientation" or that of "textual orientation". Skinner speaks about them as two prevailing "orthodoxies" which deserve to be rejected as rigid entities.<sup>26</sup> They become meaningful only when complementing one another.

### ***Respecting the Context and Respecting the Text***

*Contextual orientation* stresses the importance of knowing the context of historical and ideological texts when attempting to understand them. It warns against interpreting them as if their authors possessed all the information we possess now, or as if all our own incorrect or partial views were timeless truths.<sup>27</sup> Essentially the same goes for texts written in cultures or political systems or under circumstances strange to us. Knowledge of specific contexts of writing and the linguistic traditions and conventions prevailing in them is likewise important. This is because concepts change over time<sup>28</sup> and have different connotations in different languages and cultural and social contexts.

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<sup>24</sup> Another authority on the method of history of ideas – even if he might have been taken aback by the ceremonious title – is Dmitrii Likhachev, the pioneering scholar of the literary tradition of ancient Rus. He has written down his thoughtful reflections about how essential it is that a scholar have a respectful attitude to his research subject and be willing to learn and not just preach about what he already knows or believes (Likhachev 1985).

<sup>25</sup> Riekkinen & Veijola 1986, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Skinner 1969, 3–4.

<sup>27</sup> Collingwood 1965, 127–128.

<sup>28</sup> Skinner 1969, 31.

Knowing the context helps to avoid the danger of seeing a text as a self-sufficient monument without a relation to the world where it was written. Skinner specifies that any statement is inescapably addressed to the solution of a particular problem, on a particular occasion, and is thus specific to its situation in a way that it can only be naive to try to transcend.<sup>29</sup> He stresses that only by knowing the circumstances of the moment of writing, public opinion, and the prevailing conventions of writing is it possible to infer what a particular text says.<sup>30</sup>

Skinner mentions “the mythology of doctrines” and “the mythology of coherence” as typical pitfalls in neglecting the contexts of texts. He has in mind a researcher’s predefined conviction that the works of a thinker must make up a closed system, or that throughout his life the thinker has been of one mind as if the world around him did not change at all and pose him different challenges.<sup>31</sup> No doubt these warnings should be taken with uttermost seriousness in tackling a research subject like Shafarevich. It is vital to grant him a chance to say what he finds most important on each occasion of writing. Then again, Shafarevich as any writer should also be granted the right to be coherent, i.e., to retain his convictions and values throughout his life.

Lastly, when Skinner advises his readers to take into account the context of texts, he also warns of another extreme, that of regarding the context as the omnipotent explainer of a text. The context is, after all, nothing more than a basic framework to help infer what the writer might have had in mind at a specific point of time and place. It provides a clue to the conventions of communication he might have adopted but not automatically the key to the ultimate meaning of his texts.<sup>32</sup>

Then, *textual orientation* warns against reading the most fantastic meanings between the lines of a text. The fact that a text is in a “defenceless” state and not able to resist incorrect interpretations is worth taking seriously. Textual orientation highlights that in a normal case the writer has included all those things in his text that he has felt necessary, and that he has been free to say them as clearly as he has considered justified. The text needs to be read respectfully, as a unique document, and its reader must be careful not to over-interpret it.

In Shafarevich’s case the argument about reading between the lines should perhaps nevertheless be raised. He wrote his earliest texts in the Soviet Union in conditions where one could hardly speak about a writer’s freedom. Authors learnt to write in hints what it was not possible to say directly, and the readers learnt to read it from them. However, Shafarevich was one of those people who chose freedom of conscience and opinion even at the risk of being sent to prison or a labour camp.<sup>33</sup> None of his non-mathematical writings were published in the pre-perestroika Soviet

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 7–22.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 49–50.

<sup>33</sup> See Shafarevich 1994 [1974]b, the typed *Statement in case of arrest* Shafarevich wrote in 1974 and entrusted to his daughter.

Union; he did not even try to publish them. Consequently they were never subjected to censorship, circulating as manuscripts and being published in the West to be smuggled back into the Soviet Union.

Many dissident authors, including Shafarevich, have also explicitly stated that in these strictly controlled conditions the aspiration to express one's opinion has been all the more persistent.<sup>34</sup> While other means of voicing one's opinion were limited, people tried to get said in clandestine writing all they were not able to express otherwise. These Soviet realities will be handled in more detail later.

Textual orientation lastly highlights that each writer has a personal vocabulary which is best discovered in their texts themselves.<sup>35</sup> From this perspective it should be an asset for the study that especially from the years after the Soviet era there exists a very large body of Shafarevich's writings, interviews and statements. In particular, the interviews are helpful for the purpose of cross-checking my interpretations because the interviewer's questions and counterarguments prompt Shafarevich to give examples, state reasons for his views, define the circumstances of his ideas and so forth. Naturally the fact that as I write this Shafarevich is alive and well and that I have had the chance to put questions to him has also greatly facilitated matters.

### ***Motive and Intention and Why They Matter***

Skinner has further highlighted that when studying ideological texts it makes sense to take notice of their motives and intentions.

*Motive* is made up of the occurrences and circumstances preceding a particular act – in this case the writing of Shafarevich's texts.<sup>36</sup> Shafarevich's motives are composed of such things as historical, ideological, social and cultural conditions in the Soviet Union and Russia. They include Shafarevich's relation to these conditions, his own choices and convictions, and so on.

*Intention* is, then, the writer's explicit decision to speak in a specific purpose or to make a statement in a particular way. Thus, for a dissident writer like Shafarevich the intention of writing may have been, for instance, to encourage his readers to reconsider Soviet doctrines, to challenge an accepted convention of thinking about the pre-revolutionary Russia, and so forth.<sup>37</sup>

To sum up, it is important to consider what the questions are to which Shafarevich wants to give his own answer and whom he has had in mind when choosing his forms of argument, his style and expression.

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<sup>34</sup> Shafarevich 1974 [1971].

<sup>35</sup> Skinner 1969, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Skinner 1972, 401.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 401–404.

## ***Influence: No-one Writes in a Vacuum or Just Recycles Others' Old Ideas***

The issue of the influence which other thinkers' ideas and texts have had on the author in question is also relevant. However, while it is certainly worthwhile to consider the question of influence, the limitations and shortcomings of this approach need to be acknowledged.

Markku Hyrkkänen, a historian of ideas who follows the guidelines of Collingwood and Skinner, has argued powerfully against the analysis of influence. His example of its senselessness at its extreme are sophisticated film criticisms which make the reader "marvel at how many film directors the critic knows" but which do not really say much about the film being reviewed.<sup>38</sup> Hyrkkänen warns that analysis of influence easily becomes a matter of showing that if writer B has idea *b*, idea *a* of writer A must have influenced him if they have much in common. He states that this sort of research leads nowhere, because both its assumption and its conclusion are that B is susceptible to influence.<sup>39</sup>

In this kind of analysis of influence the shady side of relativism – the tendency to silence all that might deserve to be acknowledged as original and personal – becomes too dominant. Then again, certainly nothing is born in a vacuum without some stimulus, previous tradition, motivation, and interaction.

Hyrkkänen outlines that it is a fruitful starting point to assume that both ideas *a* and *b* have arisen as responses to similar questions worth pondering. Who responded to them first is already an issue of secondary importance. Indeed, even demonstrable influence does not explain why the issue itself has arisen. Besides, formally similar thoughts can come up in different contexts, and may actually be answers to somewhat different – even entirely contradictory – questions. Narrow analysis of influence misses these observations.

Following Collingwood, Hyrkkänen sees the most meaningful research questions to be: 'Which are the questions the writer wants to answer in his text?' and, 'What kind of answer he provides to these questions?'.<sup>40</sup> These research questions can then be complemented with that of influence, as long as it does not lead to neglecting free will and the responsibility of the author. It is also interesting to consider *how* the author has chosen to be influenced. One can, after all, be influenced in a myriad of ways in addition to simply soaking up others' ideas as such. One can become traumatised, aggravated or provoked by them, and so forth.

The history of ideas method has been discussed above in such detail because Shafarevich has such a controversial reputation. It is essential to adopt a method that prevents me from typecasting him in prescribed roles and relativising him unfairly. While the study does not intend mindless acceptance of Shafarevich – that

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<sup>38</sup> Hyrkkänen 1984, 23–24.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 11–30. See also Skinner 1969, 25–26.

<sup>40</sup> Hyrkkänen 1984, 30–66.

would not be fair even towards him – the method should help to relate his texts and ideas to his own premises and circumstances. Inescapably this means rising to their challenge as well.

### ***Ideas and Their Limits***

The conception about challenges of ideas is closely related to the conception that each idea has its own “mandate” – its own limits. Collingwood has illustrated the point. If Marx’s ideas are understood to be highlighting the fact that economic relations deserve serious attention in industrial societies, his ideas make good sense. If, however, his ideas are ossified into a doctrine about economic facts always being the only ones determining the course of history, they become a fatal historical error.<sup>41</sup> This is where the dimension of morality enters the field of the history of ideas which would perhaps otherwise seem to be disturbingly relativistic: when ideas exceed their natural mandate, they become harmful almost inescapably.

No doubt, not only an interpreter can ossify an idea – or stretch its limits so that it explodes like a balloon blown up too full. Its originator, too, can force it beyond its mandate. When such an idea becomes influential and gains momentum, it can be more than a trivial matter. These considerations are not without relevance in the case of Marx, either (incidentally, Shafarevich has also contributed to this debate, as subsequent chapters will show).

To return again to Shafarevich, only by attempting to understand the limits of his ideas and by examining whether his ideas do hold within their limits is it possible to engage with him in a dialogue that makes sense to both parties, intellectually as well as morally. Of course this ultimately boils down to the centrality of the concept of responsibility: the researcher of Shafarevich’s ideas can say something meaningful about Shafarevich’s responsibility only by holding tightly on to his (or her) own.

## **Sources and Literature and How to Approach Them**

### ***Articles, Interviews, Lectures, Films***

The primary sources of the study, Shafarevich’s non-mathematical works, have appeared in various editions in Russian.<sup>42</sup> The most comprehensive collection of his texts up to 1994 is the three-volume *Collected Works of Igor Rostislavovich Shafarevich*. Its last volume (consisting of two books) is dedicated to his

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<sup>41</sup> Collingwood 1965, 39–40.

<sup>42</sup> Many of his major works are also available on the internet.