

Religion and the National Past in the Late Soviet Union: The Debate over the Preservation of Historic Churches in Moldova

Erin Hutchinson
Paper Presented at the 2019 ASN World Convention
Columbia University
2-4 May 2019

Do Not Cite Without the Permission of the Author

Starting in the mid-1950s, Soviet cultural elites led major pushes to preserve historic churches in a number of Soviet republics. Some of the most active participants in these movements, which developed in many different Soviet republics, were writers who were born in villages. For writers who grew up in rural areas in the 1920s and 1930s in the aftermath of collectivization, a vacant church was part of the everyday village landscape. Regardless of their attitudes towards the institutional church, they were sure to have known many religious believers growing up, as religious belief tended to be stronger in the countryside than in urban areas. After moving to cities as young men, these young writers got involved in the nascent movement to preserve historic churches. The broader dissertation chapter of which this is an excerpt compares the historic preservation activities of three rural writers: Vladimir Soloukhin in Russia, Oles' Honchar in Ukraine, and Ion Druță in Moldova. This conference paper focuses on the founding the Moldovan Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture and Moldovan writer Ion Druță's critique of the organization in his 1973 novella *The Aroma of Ripe Quince*.

Culture and politics were deeply intertwined when it came to the issue of cultural heritage preservation.¹ Historical preservation efforts were never “just” about the fate of some old buildings. Rather, the pan-Soviet movement to preserve historic churches was a major forum in which cultural and political leaders struggled over the meaning of the nation. I argue, first, that one major motivation of the preservationists was to re-integrate religion into national history and to articulate the significance of that national history for Soviet citizens. Second, I argue that over time the optimism of the mid-1960s discussions of preservation gave way to deep pessimism. The failures of government-sponsored Societies for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture left many writers demoralized about the possibility of achieving their goal of the reimagining of national history within the Soviet system.

The movement for church preservation also sheds light on the transition from the Khrushchev and Brezhnev era, highlighting the impact of different political networks on Soviet nationalities policy. During his tenure, Nikita Khrushchev was sympathetic to expressions of national sentiment among non-Russian intellectuals and skeptical of Russian cultural nationalists. In contrast, Khrushchev's successor, Leonid Brezhnev, pursued what Yitzhak Brudny called a "politics of inclusion" toward Russian nationalists, with the ultimate goal of transforming them into a force that would support the regime.² I argue that Brezhnev's political protégés in Moldova and Ukraine adopted a "politics of exclusion," seeking to marginalize nationally-minded intellectuals. In Ukraine, Party leader Petro Shelest (backed by Nikolai Podgorny in the Politburo) pursued an inclusionary politics towards the members of the Ukrainian national revival throughout the 1960s. As Brezhnev and his network gained power after Khrushchev's ouster in 1964, Shelest's

¹ For a discussion of cultural politics, see Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1991).

² Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

inclusionary policies became increasingly untenable, as demonstrated by the campaign against Oles' Honchar's 1968 novel *Cathedral*. When Shelest was finally replaced in 1972, the new head of the Ukrainian republic, Brezhnev ally Volodymyr Shcherbyts'kii quickly adopted a harsh politics of exclusion towards the Ukrainian cultural intelligentsia. In the Moldovan SSR, exclusionary politics began when a Brezhnev ally, Ivan Bodiul, took power in 1961. Yet the Moldovan writer Ion Druță managed to avoid Bodiul's policies by fleeing into the open arms of the Moscow cultural elite. The case of Moldova illustrates how inclusionary politics in one republic could have unintended spillover effects in others. Ultimately, while preservation advocates in all three republics were disillusioned by the failure of the monument societies to halt the Soviet state's continuing neglect of churches, the exclusionary politics adopted in Moldova and Ukraine further divided the Moldovan and Ukrainian cultural elite from the Soviet state.

Soviet Policy Towards Historic Preservation under Khrushchev

Ion Druță's advocacy for the preservation of historic churches must be understood in the context of the growing intellectual movement for historic preservation in the Soviet Union after the death of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. Khrushchev's relaxation of censorship as a part of his policy of de-Stalinization created a space for Soviet intellectuals to call for the restoration of churches that had been neglected in the aftermath of collectivization and Stalin's anti-religious campaigns. In 1955, a small letter to the editor appeared in *Literaturnaia gazeta*. In the letter, archaeologist Nikolai Voronin and medievalist Dmitrii Likhachev decried the neglect of treasures of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century wooden church architecture in the Russian North. It was the first of many campaigns by these two leading scholars of old Russian history to preserve

Russia's architectural legacy.³ In 1956, a group of Moscow-based intellectuals, including the preservationist Pëtr Baranovskii, sent a telegram to Khrushchev protesting the closure of the State Inspection for the Preservation of Monuments.⁴ Writers associated with the nascent Village Prose movement also began to raise this issue in the Russian and all-Union press. Efim Dorosh's *A Village Diary* (published in *Literaturnaia Moskva* in 1956) and Vladimir Soloukhin's *Vladimir Country Roads* (published in *Novyi mir* in 1957) portrayed ancient churches, many of them crumbling from neglect, as an essential part of the Russian landscape.⁵ Soloukhin's work, which could be read all over the country as *Novyi mir* was an all-Union journal, discussed a twelfth-century church that had fallen into ruin, as well as successful efforts to preserve the churches of the ancient city of Suzdal'. In *Vladimir Country Roads*, the white churches of Suzdal', peasant folk traditions, even historic noble country estates were all elements of the pre-revolutionary Russian past that were worth preserving.⁶

While Khrushchev's Thaw and de-Stalinization made the emergence of a church preservation movement possible, they did not translate into greater freedom for the Orthodox Church or greater attention to the country's crumbling churches. Quite the contrary: even as Khrushchev was repudiating Stalinist terror, he launched a new assault on the church that was reminiscent of Stalin's policies during the Cultural Revolution. Starting in October of 1958 with the persecution of monasteries, the Central Committee and the Council of Ministers curtailed the activities of the church with a series of decrees. This wide-ranging attack on all aspects of Russian Orthodox

³ A. Moroz et al., "Nel'zia tak otnosit'sia k pamiatnikam narodnogo zodchestva," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, January 15, 1955. Vladislav Zubok, *The Idea of Russia: The Life and Work of Dmitry Likhachev* (London ; New York: I.B.Tauris, 2017).

⁴ See Igor Demchenko, "Decentralized Past: Heritage Politics in Post-Stalin Central Asia," *Future Anterior* 8, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 65-6.

⁵ Brudny, 48, 55.

⁶ Vladimir Soloukhin, *A Walk in Rural Russia*, (New York, Dutton 1967, 1967), 104-106, 198-207. See also Brudny, 55.

Church life led to a nearly 50% decline in the number of officially operating churches from 1958 to 1966.⁷ During the period of the anti-religious campaign, there were several high-profile cases of peasant mobilization around churches and monasteries that were threatened with closure, particularly in Moldova and other recently Sovietized western borderlands.⁸

As church and monastery closures once again rocked the countryside, a new type of state-sponsored volunteer organization began to emerge in the Soviet Union: Societies for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture. While peasant protestors attempted to keep churches and monasteries open for religious purposes, the preservation societies sought to save them as works of art.⁹ In the spirit of other social [*obshchestvennye*] organizations promoted under Nikita Khrushchev, these societies were intended to replace state bureaucracies with organizations that would harness initiative from below.¹⁰ Moscow liquidated the prior all-Union heritage preservation organization, the State Inspection for the Preservation of Monuments, placing heritage preservation in the hands of republican authorities.¹¹ The emergence of republican Societies for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture in the late 1950s and early 1960s encapsulates many of the contradictions of the period. A desire on the part of the state to encourage public initiative, combined with a more liberal cultural policy, allowed for the emergence of organizations whose goal of preserving “cultural heritage” in the form of churches was odds with the ongoing anti-religious campaign. Khrushchev’s anti-religious campaign, combined with his

⁷ Mikhail V. Shkarovskii, “The Russian Orthodox Church in 1958-64,” *Russian Studies in History* 50, no. 3 (Winter 2011): 94.

⁸ V. A. Kozlov, “Orthodoxy in Revolt: Uprisings Among Religious Believers,” in *Mass Uprisings in the USSR: Protest and Rebellion in the Post-Stalin Years*, trans. Elaine McClarnand MacKinnon, *The New Russian History* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2002), 163–69.

⁹ See Kelly’s discussion of the varying goals of believers and preservationists in Catriona Kelly, *Socialist Churches: Radical Secularization and the Preservation of the Past in Petrograd and Leningrad, 1918-1988* (DeKalb, IL: NIU Press, 2016).

¹⁰ Eleonory Gilburd, “The Revival of Soviet Internationalism in the Mid to Late 1950s,” in *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s*, ed. Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 373.

administration's overall disregard for historic buildings and neighborhoods in city-planning, further fueled interest in the preservation societies.

The first three Societies for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture were founded in the South Caucasus, starting with the Georgian SSR in 1959 and followed by Azerbaijan (1962) and Armenia (1964). As the political and intellectual elites of the South Caucasus were particularly enthusiastic about pursuing the goals of nation-building through state institutions, it is not surprising that these state-sponsored voluntary societies first emerged there.¹² As we will see, the preservation of historic churches became deeply intertwined with the reassertion of the nation in public discourse. Fearing the growing influence of Russian nationalists in the cultural sphere, Khrushchev initially blocked the creation of a monument preservation society in the RSFSR. At the same October 1964 party plenum that witnessed Khrushchev's fall from power, the Party mandated the creation of republican Societies for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture across the Soviet Union.¹³ The organizations began to spread beyond the Caucasus to other Soviet republics, including Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova (all in 1966). Writers often played a major role in the formation of these institutions, which they hoped would help them move beyond statements of protest into action.

The Founding of the Moldovan Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture

¹¹ Demchenko, 65-68.

¹² On the South Caucasus, see V. A. Shnirel'man, *The Value of the Past: Myths, Identity and Politics in Transcaucasia* (Osaka, Japan: National Museum of Ethnology, 2001). Maïke Lehmann, "Apricot Socialism: The National Past, the Soviet Project, and the Imagining of Community in Late Soviet Armenia," *Slavic Review* 74, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 9–31. Claire Pogue Kaiser, "Lived Nationality: Policy and Practice in Soviet Georgia, 1945-1978" (University of Pennsylvania, 2015), Publicly Accessible Penn Dissertations (1795), <http://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/1795>.

In Moldova, as we will see, the Moldovan Central Committee ordered the founding of the republican Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture as a way of appeasing the fractious Moldovan intelligentsia. This concession must be understood within the broader development of a “politics of exclusion” towards the nationally-minded intelligentsia in Moldova. The case of the Moldova is an early example of the application of exclusionary politics to a Soviet republic. While the Ukrainian leadership, with their strong ties with Khrushchev, escaped an anti-nationalist purge in the Khrushchev era, Moldova experienced an anti-nationalist purge from 1959 to 1961. The Khrushchev-appointed leader of the MSSR, Zinovii Serdiuk, was no cultural liberal, but his replacement in 1961 by Ivan Bodiul ushered in a new era of anti-nationalist exclusionary politics that hardened throughout the 1960s and ossified in the 1970s. Through comparison of the fate of a preservationist author in Moldova with the Russian and Ukrainian cases, we can see the impact of Bodiul’s policies on national culture in Moldova. The Moldovan prose writer Ion Druță’s particular brand of rural-based Moldovan cultural nationalism had firmly established him as the *enfant terrible* of the MSSR in the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁴ Forced to flee the republic in 1965, in 1973 he published a novella in a Moscow-based journal that attacked the MSSR leadership’s policy toward Moldovan cultural heritage. It focused particularly on the preservation of a monastery bell-tower that Druță, like his fellow writers in Russia and Ukraine, associated with his nation’s heroic past. Residing and publishing in Moscow, Druță was able to take advantage of the inclusionary politics towards Russian nationalists, who actively published works on historic preservation after Brezhnev’s rise to power. The fact that Druță was able to

¹³ This decision referenced in RGANI 5/36/157 (February 17, 1966): 14-15 in N. G. Tomilina, ed., *Apparat TSK KPSS i kul'tura, 1965-1972: dokumenty*, Kul'tura i vlast' ot Stalina do Gorbacheva, dokumenty (Moskva: ROSSPĖN Rossiiskaia politicheskaia entsiklopediia, 2009), 196-197.

¹⁴ For more on Druță, see Chapter 2 of my forthcoming dissertation, “The Cultural Politics of the Nation in the Soviet Union after Stalin, 1952-1991.”

avoid the exclusionary politics in Moldova by publishing in Moscow shows that Brezhnev's politics of inclusion towards Russian nationalists in the RSFSR had spillover effects in other republics.

The anti-nationalist campaign reached Moldova in early 1959. The Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Moldova dedicated their meeting on January 9, 1959, to criticism of the Moldovan journals *Chiparuș* and *Nistru*. As Moldovan historian Ruslan Șevcenko explains, the journals were punished for daring to publish critical articles on the activities of the republic's collective farms and the nationalities policy of the regime. These accusations were repeated in a plenum of the Communist Party of Moldova in September, when several writers were accused of nationalism. Șevcenko identifies the period from 1959 to 1960 as a new stage in Moscow's anti-national policy, which temporarily succeeded in stifling opposition among writers.¹⁵ Amid these accusations of "nationalistic tendencies," "national limitedness," and "idealization of the past" in the cultural sphere, the head of the Moldovan Party, Zinovii Serdiuk, was removed. Serdiuk had been head of the Moldovan republic since 1954. An ethnic Ukrainian, he had a close relationship to Khrushchev, having worked with him during World War II before rising to hold a number of important positions in the Ukrainian Party.¹⁶ In May of 1961, Serdiuk was replaced by Ivan Bodiul, a Moldovan from Ukraine. Bodiul was the first ethnic Moldovan to lead the republic, but he had been born outside its borders and spoke Russian as his primary language. Bodiul owed his political rise to his connections to Brezhnev, who had been the head of

¹⁵ Ruslan Șevcenko, *Viața politică în R.S.S. Moldovenească (1944-1961)* (Chișinău: Pontos, 2007), 65.

¹⁶ Serdiuk was also Khrushchev's brother-in-law. Igor Cașu and Mark Sandle, "Discontent and Uncertainty in the Borderlands: Soviet Moldavia and the Secret Speech 1956–1957," *Europe-Asia Studies* 66, no. 4 (2014): 618.

the MSSR from 1950 to 1951.¹⁷ Bodiul thus took power with a mandate to control manifestations of nationalism in Moldova.

Ion Druță was one of Bodiul's chief antagonists among the Moldovan writers. Druță despised Bodiul for his conspicuous lack of support for the Moldovan language. Druță had already clashed with the Moldovan leader over his play *Casa mare* in 1961-2 and his novel *Steppe Ballads* in 1963.¹⁸ Their antagonism continued in 1965, when the Moldovan party bosses expressed their dissatisfaction with Moldova Film's production of Druță's novella *The Last Month of Autumn*. Druță's frustration boiled over at the Third Congress of the Union of Writers of Moldova, held in Chișinău on October 14-15, 1965. In his speech at the Congress, Druță brought up the controversial issue of the Latin alphabet.¹⁹ In Soviet Moldova, the Moldovan (Romanian) language was written using the Cyrillic alphabet, which many Moldovan intellectuals saw as dividing them from the Romanian linguistic community, which had transitioned to using the Latin alphabet over the course of the nineteenth century.²⁰ In an interview in Moscow in 2016, Druță stated that he decided to raise the issue specifically in order to antagonize the Moldovan leadership for having criticized the film adaptation of *The Last Month of Autumn*.²¹ The positive reaction in the hall ("prolonged applause" according to the official transcript) surprised even Druță.²² Druță's speech was probably the most dramatic of the Congress, but other authors spoke passionately about the inferior state of the Moldovan language in the republic and the need to pre-

¹⁷ Igor Cașu, "*Politica Națională*" în *Moldova Sovietică (1944-1989)* (Chișinău: Cardidact, 2000), 62. John P. Willerton, "Patronage Networks and Coalition Building in the Brezhnev Era," *Soviet Studies* 39, no. 2 (April 1987): 188.

¹⁸ Ion Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii: mărturii și spovedanii* (București: Editura Academiei Române, 2011), 24-33.

¹⁹ Arhiva Organizațiilor Social-Politice a Republicii Moldova (AOSPRM) 51/42/151 (October 14-15, 1965): 104-110.

²⁰ Matthew Ciscel, "A Separate Moldovan Language? The Sociolinguistics of Moldova's Limba de Stat," *Nationalities Papers* 34, no. 5 (2006): 576-578.

²¹ Ion Druță, interview with the author, June 20, 2017.

²² AOSPRM 51/42/151 (October 14-15, 1965): 107.

serve cultural heritage.²³ Pavel Boțu, an up-and-coming young poet, criticized the fact that significant cultural monuments, such as the Căpřiana monastery, had fallen into disrepair.²⁴ Despite the controversy at the Congress, the Party bureau of the Writers' Union wrote in their report that it had been a success.²⁵

The Moldovan Party leadership disagreed. On November 17, Bodiul delivered a speech at a meeting of the Party cell of the Union of Writers. Bodiul denied that there was any intent to insult the national sentiments of Moldovans, although he granted that the writers had correctly touched on certain areas of concern, such as the development of the Moldovan language and the need to improve attitudes towards monuments of culture. He criticized "certain people in the republic" for displaying "national limitedness," being insufficiently educated in the spirit of internationalism, and having a weak sense of pride in their homeland. "They sometimes make incorrect judgements and even make attacks of a nationalist character," he stated.²⁶ In a letter to the Central Committee in Moscow on November 29, Bodiul noted the presence of nationalistic tendencies among some of the younger writers at the Congress, singling out Aureliu Busuioc, Gheorghe Malarciuc, and Druță. He specifically noted Boțu's concerns about the preservation of monuments and expressed his dismay at Druță's "pro-Romanian" speech.²⁷ A December 3 decision by the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Moldova harshly criticized the Congress, stating that the writers (especially Busuioc, Malarciuc, Druță and the critic Mihai Cimpoi) had made false claims about the neglect of national culture in the republic and displayed unhealthy nationalist attitudes. At the same time, the Presidium made several con-

²³ For an overview of the Congress by a participant, see Mihai Cimpoi, "Un congres al scriitorilor cu impact istoric," *Akademos* 39, no. 4 (2015): 127–31.

²⁴ AOSPRM 51/42/151 (October 14-15, 1965): 146.

²⁵ AOSPRM 276/1/18 (October 25, 1965): 61.

²⁶ AOSPRM 51/42/116 (November 17, 1965): 47, 55.

cessions to the writers, promising to expand publication in the Moldovan language and making provisions for the founding of a Moldovan Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture.²⁸ The writers' rebellion at the Congress had resulted in censure for some, but also seemed to strengthen support for national culture.

The MSSR Soviet of Ministers approved the organizational charter of the Moldovan Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture on February 28, 1966.²⁹ The correspondence of the organization, led by Nicolae Corlăteanu, the director of the Institute of Language and Literature of the Moldovan Academy of Sciences, indicates that during the late 1960s and early 1970s, they focused on the preservation of cultural sites, such as the graves of Moldovan writers and the historic monastery at Orhei Vechi, as well as military monuments and mass graves from World War II. It is difficult to evaluate the real impact of the society on the basis of archival documents, but they do seem to have dedicated substantial attention to specifically Moldovan cultural heritage. The organization occasionally flirted with controversy: In 1971 they sought permission to grant religious organizations status as collective members of the Society, which suggests that they conducted their historical preservation mission in cooperation with the Orthodox Church. (The request was denied.)³⁰

Druță had no opportunity to participate in the new Moldovan Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture because by 1966 he had already fled the republic. After his speech at the Third Congress, Bodiul called him and the other members of the leadership of the Union of Writers to the Central Committee to explain themselves. As they were walking towards

²⁷ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii (RGANI) 5/36/148 (November 29, 1965): in N. G. Tomilina, ed., *Apparat TSK KPSS i kul'tura , 1965-1972 : dokumenty*, 100-107. See also AOSPRM 51/25/101 (November 29, 1965): 121-127.

²⁸ AOSPRM 51/25/25 (December 3, 1965): 21-24.

²⁹ AOSPRM 2454/1/1 (February 28, 1966).

the Central Committee building, near the triumphal arch on the main square of Chişinău, Ion Ciobanu, the head of the Union of Writers, delicately suggested to Druţă that it was time for him to settle permanently in Moscow.³¹ But Druţă did not forget about the organization that was founded because he and the other writers had caused such a stir at the 1965 Congress of the Union of Writers.

Druţă's Critique of the Moldovan Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture

In September of 1973, Druţă published the novella *The Aroma of Ripe Quince* in the liberal-leaning illustrated journal *Iunost'* (*Youth*).³² The novella told the story of Horia Holban, a youth from the northern Moldovan region of Bucovina who becomes fascinated with local history thanks to his history teacher, Ilarie Turcu. He continues his studies with Turcu as a student at the history faculty of Chişinău State University, where he meets and falls in love with Jeanette, a fellow student from a village near the Căpriană monastery. After graduating, Turcu helps Horia find a position as an inspector at the newly-founded Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture. Horia buys himself a camera, learns how to draw architectural sketches of old buildings, and begins hitchhiking across Moldova to collect information about historic monuments. After each trip, he brings back suitcases full of materials. Horia eventually learns, however, that he would have been better off staying at the headquarters of the Society and spending his time solving crossword puzzles like his boss Balţatu. Balţatu is clearly less than thrilled with Horia's expeditions, and Horia begins to realize that his trips are causing conflict between

³⁰ See the correspondence of the Society in AOSPRM 2454/1/3 (1966), 2452/1/9 (1968), 2454/1/12 (1970), 2454/1/16 (1971). The request can be found in Arhiva naţională a Republicii Moldova (ANRM) 3011/10/463 (June 16, 1971): 41-45.

³¹ Ion Druţă, "Kogda, kak i pochemu uekhal Drutse iz Moldavii," in *Ora jertfirii: proză, publicistică, scrisori* (Chişinău: Cartea Moldovei, 1998), 56-57.

³² Ion Drutse, "Zapakh speloi aivy," *Iunost'*, no. 9 (1973). Reprinted in Ion Drutse, *Oдиночество dukha* (Moskva: Galeriia, 2013), 285-394.

his former professor Turcu and Balțatu. Over time, the opposition from Balțatu causes Turcu to sour on Horia's preservationist efforts as well. The issue finally comes to a head when Balțatu asks Horia to stand in line for him to buy spare parts for his car. Turcu calls Horia an idiot for refusing to complete the everyday humiliating tasks expected of a subordinate of a man like Balțatu. Horia realizes he has no choice but to leave the Society for good. As a parting kindness, Turcu secures Horia a position as a history teacher in his wife's village.

The Aroma of Ripe Quince is a clear indictment of government-sponsored preservationist efforts in Moldova in particular, and Moldovan cultural policy in general. Much like the character of Volodymyr Loboda in Oles' Honchar's *Cathedral*, the government functionaries in *The Aroma of Ripe Quince* are careerists and opportunists. They are unwilling to stick out their necks to protect national culture. The very fact that working to preserve national cultural heritage is a risky career move in the MSSR illustrates that, in Druță's opinion, the Moldovan authorities are hostile to Moldovan culture. Moreover, the moral failings and overall disregard for national culture displayed by government officials like Balțatu infect otherwise well-meaning people like Turcu. The novella is thus a strong indictment of the Soviet state's failure to preserve national culture in Moldova.

Much like other Soviet preservationist writers, Druță shows how a church building is embedded in a web of history in *The Aroma of Ripe Quince*. Having quit the Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture to teach in a school in the village of Căpriană, Horia begins to educate his students about the history of a bell-tower near the neighboring monastery. Druță links his bell-tower with a figure from the glorious national past: the Moldovan national hero Ștefan cel Mare (Stephen the Great). According to the legend that Druță recounts in the novella, the fifteenth-century prince took refuge at the Căpriană monastery after a military defeat.

There a monk chided him for retreating from the field of battle, ultimately spurring him to gather a new army and defeat his enemies. After completing a successful campaign, Ștefan cel Mare built the bell-tower and made his finest soldiers the bell-ringers. Like the young Ukrainian student Mykola Bahlay in Honchar's *Cathedral*, Horia sees the religious building as a priceless symbol of the national past. He tries to inspire his students to save the decaying bell-tower, but, like Bahlay and his fellow villagers, he runs into opposition from the local authorities—in this case, the director of the school, Baltu. While Horia is away from the village, the bell-tower burns down, plunging him into despair. Despite the tragedy, Horia still believes that his calling as a teacher requires him to soldier on by teaching the young generation about their heroic national history.

In his 2011 memoir *Angel of Survival*, Druță writes that the Moldovan Party leadership sought to prevent the circulation of the journal in Moldova by suspending its sale at newspaper kiosks. Druță also reports that Boris Polevoi, the editor of *Iunost'*, told him that the Moldovan authorities sent a letter to the Politburo in Moscow accusing Druță of nationalism. When asked to retract the issue of the journal and ban Druță from its pages, Polevoi, who had been a frontline correspondent for *Pravda* during the Second World War, gave an unprintable “soldierly reply.”³³

Druță's novella may have infuriated the Moldovan authorities, but it was well-received by the literary establishment in Moscow. He received a favorable review in *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, the press organ of the RSFSR Writers' Union. In 1974, the publishing house *Molodaia gvardiia* published the novella in book form as part of a larger collection of Druță's recent works.³⁴ Founded as the press organ of the Komsomol, the publisher *Molodaia gvardiia* had from the early 1960s been dominated by conservative Russian nationalists affiliated with the “group of Pavlov” that

³³ It is unclear whether Polevoi was referring to the 1977 letter discussed below, or a separate letter. This question awaits further research in RGANI. Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii*, 54.

dominated the Central Committee of the Komsomol. Throughout the 1960s and '70s, the publisher actively supported Russian nationalist writers in general, and Village Prose writers like Soloukhin in particular.³⁵ The publisher had a history of supporting Druță in his conflicts with Moldovan authorities: they had stood up for him at a meeting of the Soviet Central Committee when, at the behest the Moldovan Party, the Department of Propaganda challenged Druță's depiction of the postwar famine in his 1968 novel *Burden of Our Kindness*.³⁶ In the afterward to the volume, the critic Valentin Oskotskii reiterated many of the points that Druță raised in *The Aroma of Ripe Quince*. Oskotskii wrote that the bell-tower at the Căpriană monastery "reminded present generations of [...] the heroic traditions of national history," thus underlining Druță's connection between the religious building and the military victory of Ștefan cel Mare. He also supported Druță's critique of anti-national attitudes among authority figures, noting that the Căpriană school director's lack of respect for history is symptomatic of his "immorality."³⁷

In 1977, the Moldovan authorities sent a series of letters to all-Union bodies in Moscow complaining about continued support for Druță's works by all-Union journals, publishers, and theaters. The immediate trigger for this flurry of letters was the premiere of Druță's controversial play *Holy of Holies* at the Central Theater of the Soviet Army in Moscow, but Moldovan authorities took pains to complain about *The Aroma of Ripe Quince* as well. An April 6 letter from secretary of the Central Committee of the Moldovan Communist Party I. Kalinin to the State Committee of the Soviet of Ministers on Publishers, Printing and the Book Trade complained about the publication of Druță's works by central publishers, making specific mention of the publica-

³⁴ Ion Druță, *Vozvrashchenie na krugi svoia: povesti* (Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 1974).

³⁵ N. Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia: dvizhenie russkikh natsionalistov v SSSR, 1953-1985 gody* (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2003), 256-268.

³⁶ Zoia Iakhontova, "Koe-cto iz zhizni redaktsii prozy," in *Zhizn' zamechatel'nogo izdatel'stva*, ed. S. V. Artakhov and V. F. Iurkin (Moskva: Izd-vo "Molodaia gvardiia, 1997), 162. The volume in question was Ion Druță, *Bremia nasheĭ dobroty: roman* (Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 1969).

tion of *The Aroma of Ripe Quince* by the publishing house *Molodaia gvardiia*.³⁸ An April 14 letter from I. Kalinin to the Central Committee in Moscow laid out the Moldovan Party leadership's case against the novella. Much like the critics of Honchar's novel *Cathedral*, Kalinin said *The Aroma of Ripe Quince* was critical of modern Soviet life. Druță romanticized the past, identifying the patriarchal old ways as the essence of national character. The Moldovan Communist Party secretary complained that *Molodaia gvardiia* had ignored negative reviews of the novella in the republican press in Moldova. He objected to Oskotskii's afterward, as well as the publication of positive reviews of the novella in the RSFSR and all-Union press. Support for Druță by Moscow-based literary institutions was harmful, Kalinin stated, because Druță had a detrimental effect on public opinion in the MSSR and made the Party's work with other Moldovan intellectuals difficult.³⁹

The Moldovan Party's appeal to central authorities reveals the difficulty of maintaining exclusionary politics in one republic while the regime was pursuing inclusionary politics towards Russian nationalists. As Druță's example illustrates, the Soviet Union was a relatively integrated cultural space. This was particularly the case after the founding of the Higher Literary Courses for young Soviet writers in Moscow and the expansion of *Druzhba narodov*, a Moscow-based journal that published non-Russian writers in translation, in the 1950s.⁴⁰ When thwarted by exclusionary politics at the republican level, Druță was able to set up shop in Moscow and take advantage of Brezhnev's inclusionary politics towards nationalists at publishing houses like *Molodaia gvardiia*. In Moscow, Druță managed to maintain good relationships with the liberal camp

³⁷ Valentin Oskotskii, "Chetyre etiuda k protretu Iona Drutse," in *Vozvrashchenie na krugi svoia: povesti* (Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 1974), 386-387.

³⁸ AOSPRM 51/44/7 (April 6, 1977): 15. Special thanks to Irina Nicorich for locating this document.

³⁹ RGANI 5/73/424 (April 14, 1977): 22-26, in N. G. Tomilina and T. Iu Konova, eds., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1973-1978: dokumenty: v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 2, 2 vols., Seriiia Kul'tura i vlast' ot Stalina do Gorbacheva. Dokumenty (Moskva: ROSSPĖN, 2011), 84-87. This document can also be found at AOSPRM 51/44/3 (April 14, 1977): 63-65.

as well as the nationalist camp, publishing in the liberal journals *Novyi mir* and *Druzhba narodov* as well as the publishing house *Molodaia gvardiia*. The fact that his subject matter dovetailed nicely with that of the Village Prose writers (a similarity that the critic Oskotskii noted) earned him the sympathy of the Russian nationalists.⁴¹ The support that Druță received in the Moscow literary world allowed him to publish in journals that were distributed throughout the Soviet Union and thus influence Moldovan literature from afar. His ability to speak to national issues from the relative freedom of Moscow made Druță an icon for the nationally-minded intelligentsia in Moldova, setting him up to play the role of the “spiritual leader” of the Moldovan national movement of the late 1980s.⁴²

But why did Druță manage to avoid the exclusionary politics of a Brezhnev client while Honchar’s novel *Cathedral* fell victim to exclusionary politics in Ukraine? Here the factor of strong patronage connections to political and cultural elites in Moscow is key. The opponents of Honchar’s novel *Cathedral* were able to place negative reviews in central publications and, more importantly, rally the all-Union KGB to their cause and. The Moldovan leader Bodiul failed to successfully mobilize his connections in Moscow against Druță. The Moldovan Party officials’ lack of influence in Moscow is illustrated by the response of Vasiliu Shauro, head of the Department of Culture of the Central Committee in Moscow, to their complaints about Druță. In a June 6 letter, Shauro, whom Yitzhak Brudny identifies as one of the architects of the politics of inclusion towards Russian nationalists, granted that Druță’s works have ideological shortcomings, referring to relevant articles in the central journals *Voprosy literatury* and *Literaturnoe obozrenie*.⁴³ Shauro noted that several of the works mentioned in the letter, including *The Aroma of Ripe*

⁴⁰ See Chapter 2 of my forthcoming dissertation.

⁴¹ Oskotskii, 371.

⁴² On Druță’s role in the Moldovan national movement during the Gorbachev era, see Charles King, *The Moldovans : Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2000), 153.

Quince, had not been republished by central publishers recently. He then complained that the Moldovan Central Committee had been inconsistent on Druță, first criticizing his play *Casa mare* as ideologically harmful in 1960, then awarding him the MSSR State Prize in 1967. In 1976 the MSSR Ministry of Culture had recommended the play *Holy of Holies* for translation and staging in theaters across the country; now they were calling it ideologically harmful. Shauro also noted that the play had received positive reviews in several publications, including *Pravda*. In the end, Shauro acceded to some of the Moldovan Party's demands, announcing that the Central Committee would work with the Central Theater of the Soviet Army to improve the ideological level of *Holy of Holies*, but refused to ban Druță's works outright.⁴⁴ Despite the protestations of the Moldovan Party, Druță continued to receive cover from the political patrons of Russian nationalists in the center. One can only speculate as to the exact reason for this, but it seems clear that there was much less political will in the center to marginalize a leading Moldovan intellectual than a leading Ukrainian one, even though their works shared similar ideological "sins."

Ivan Bodiul ran the Moldovan Party for nineteen years, finally graduating to the position of deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union, in December of 1980. His successor, Semion Grossu, seems to have adopted a milder policy toward Druță. A Moldovan-language manuscript of *The Aroma of Ripe Quince* called *The Bell-Tower* (Rom: *Clopotnița*) had apparently existed since the 1970s but had never been published in Druță's native republic.⁴⁵ Finally, in 1984, *The Bell-Tower* was published in Chișinău.⁴⁶ Much of what had been hinted at in

⁴³ Brudny, 63-64.

⁴⁴ RGANI 5/73/424 (June 6, 1977): 26-27 in N. G. Tomilina and T. Iu Konova, eds., *Apparat ŢSK KPSS i kul'tura, 1973-1978*, 124-125.

⁴⁵ The edition of *The Bell-Tower* published in Chișinău in 2017 lists its date of completion as 1972. A 1975 letter from Moldovan literary critic Vasile Coroban to Druță published in a document collection contains a reference to *Bell-Tower*. See Ion Druță, *Clopotnița*, 8th ed. (Chișinău: Cartier, 2017). Vasile Coroban, "Din scrisorile inedite adresate lui Ion Druță," in *Fenomenul artistic Ion Druța*, ed. Ion Druță and Mihail Dolgan (Chișinău: Tipografia Centrală, 2008), 603.

⁴⁶ Ion Druță, *Clopotnița* (Chișinău: Literatura artistică, 1984).

the 1972 Russian-language version was stated more boldly in the 1984 Moldovan version. For example, at the end of Horia's conversation with his former professor Turcu, Druță writes, "In a moment of illumination, [Horia] realized that this Ilarie Turcu was neither a man of science, nor a man of honor, nor a peasant from a peasant nation, as he had believed at the beginning."⁴⁷ In *The Bell-Tower*, Turcu is not simply an opportunist, but a betrayer of the Moldovan "peasant nation." The publication of *The Bell-Tower* in 1984 suggests a shift from the politics of exclusion that had characterized the Bodiul era. As elsewhere in the Soviet Union, the early 1980s brought a relaxation of the restrictive cultural policy in the MSSR. It was a prelude for what was to come when Gorbachev came to power and began initiating his liberalizing reforms. During perestroika, Druță would return to his home republic, ultimately emerging as the godfather of the Moldovan national movement.

§§§

The history of the movement to preserve historic churches in the Soviet Union illustrates how intellectuals sought to re-incorporate religion into understandings of national history. While nationally-minded Soviet intellectuals like Vladimir Soloukhin, Oles' Honchar, and Ion Druță varied in their approach to religion, all viewed it as an important part of national identity. They denied the existence of separate "bourgeois" and "popular" national cultures and presented the nation's history as a cohesive whole. By focusing their campaign on the preservation of monuments of history and culture, however, preservationists could side-step this problem by pointing to a Leninist legacy of historical preservation. The movement to preserve historic churches and monasteries arose organically from the Soviet cultural intelligentsia during Khrushchev's Thaw, resulting in the creation of voluntary Societies for the Preservation of Monuments of History and

⁴⁷ Ion Druță, *Clopotnița*, 8th ed. (Chișinău: Cartier, 2017), 122. I need to check this quotation against the 1984 text, which I have not been able to gain access to.

Culture. As the Russian and Moldovan examples show, however, these voluntary societies failed to live up to the cultural intelligentsia's expectations. In the case of Ukraine, the official campaign against Oles' Honchar's novel about the preservation of a historic church turned it into a symbol of the oppression of Ukrainian national identity by the Soviet state. Brezhnev's clients in Ukraine and Moldova pursued more repressive policies towards the nationally-minded intelligentsia, driving a wedge between them and the Soviet state. Although the Brezhnev era saw a "politics of inclusion" for Village Prose writers like Vladimir Soloukhin, he also ended up disillusioned with the failure of the Soviet state to realize his vision of a historically-rooted national identity. Moreover, the case of Druță also illustrates that the "politics of inclusion" towards Russian nationalists could have unintended effects on national intellectuals from non-Russian republics. In the end, despite variations in nationalities policies pursued by different political networks at the republican and the all-Union levels, the Soviet state's involvement in the preservationist discourse ultimately undermined its own legitimacy. Having conceded the importance of preserving national cultural heritage by founding the Societies for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture, Soviet authorities found themselves subject to harsh criticism from intellectuals like Ion Druță when these organizations failed to live up to their stated goals. The failure of the Soviet state to preserve historic churches contributed to a broader narrative among the nationally-minded cultural intelligentsia that the Soviet system was not just anti-church, but anti-national as well.