

# “A Household God in a Socialist World”

## Lewis Henry Morgan and Russian/Soviet Anthropology

*Andrei A. Znamenski*

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The article discusses the reasons for high appraisal of Lewis Henry Morgan's ethnological heritage in Russian/Soviet social scholarship. Morgan's social evolutionism, attached to Marxism by Frederick Engels, sounded attractive for the Soviet scholarship, which pulled Morgan's ideas out of the context of the nineteenth century thought and planted to the social scholarship of the 1930s-1980s. From the early 1930s anthropological officialdom in the former USSR canonized Morgan's ideas, especially his matriarchy thesis and the prophesy about the returning to the classless society in the new advanced form. Until the early 1980s the Soviet anthropology, reduced to the study of the “primitive communist formation”, developed in the rigid framework of the Morgan-Engel's concept. The article is based on the original Russian/Soviet sources.

*Andrei A. Znamenski, Senior Lecturer, Samara Pedagogical Institute, Russia.*

“Reinterpreted by Engels, Morgan became the most important ancestral figure for Soviet ethnology, and he is a revered – though perhaps rarely read – authority in the broader tradition of Marxist theory.”

Adam Kuper, *The Invention of Primitive Society* (1988: 72).

Scholars have indicated that the social scholarship in the former totalitarian society of the Soviet Union displayed considerable attention to the history of the primordial society. This subject, at first glance, lacks any political relevance. On the other hand, it is a good illustration of the fact that all types of intellectual activities, even those not connected directly with the ruling ideology, could not escape the totalitarian grips. The rationale is very simple. If we are to take for granted the collective essence of the ancient kin structure, the short period of the class-dominated relations in the long term perspective might seem temporary, or more accurately, represents the precondition for the return to the primordial system, except on a new basis. In short, the anthropological and sociological research became a rationalization for the future totalitarian utopia. This was

especially true concerning the former Soviet Union where all branches of the social scholarship were tightly connected with the dominant Stalinist ideology called Marxism-Leninism. This kind of scholarship was not related to the methods of Marxism. Rather, it served to prove the principles of the state's ideology. The situation is very typical for any totalitarian regime (Gellner 1988: 1988; Trautmann 1987: 252–253; De Wolf 1992: 473–475).<sup>1</sup>

Each area of social science had its own borders, within which scholars were allowed to pursue their own research. Thus, for example, when in the beginning of the 1930s, the totalitarian suppression of the social sciences in the USSR was in many respects finished, anthropology lost its broad cultural approach and was reduced to the study of “primitive communist formation” (Slezkine 1991: 481).<sup>2</sup> In one of the collective monographs we find substantiation for the ideological importance of this “primitive communism” — “to the founders of scientific communism, it was additional evidence in favor of the inevitability of transition from capitalist society to the communistic one” (Ter-Akopian 1991: 163).

Marx and Engels received this evidence in

*Ancient Society*, the work of an American anthropologist, Lewis Henry Morgan. As Thomas R. Trautmann put it, Morgan's social evolutionism could be "serviceable to those who wish to find in it arguments for social change" (Trautmann 1987: 251). The mastering of his works by founders of the Marxism advanced Morgan's writings to the very center of the ideology in the Soviet Union in the 1930s-1970s. This essay concerns the absorption of Morgan's ideas by the Russian and Soviet social scientists, anthropologists, historians, sociologists, who considered Morgan for a long time "a household god in a socialist world" (Ibid.). The analysis of this and similar cases might provide an additional illustration of the Soviet totalitarian control over intellectual activities when the regime used "scientific arguments" rather than direct suppression of scholars. In addition, this case can illuminate adaptation of Western ideas to the Russian environment.

## Marx's and Engels' reinterpretations of Morgan

It is well known that Frederick Engels credited L.H. Morgan, who is considered the founder of American ethnology, with independently discovering materialistic understanding of history, which was earlier invented by Karl Marx in Europe. With minor modifications Engels composed his own *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1972) around the Morgan conception of human progress. *The Origin* laid the foundations for Marxist anthropology: the "primitive communistic" nature of the primordial society, matriarchy as the necessary form of organization (later replaced by patriarchy with the coming of the early class society), and linear evolutionary development of society through stages of progress.

Like Morgan, Engels was convinced that the governing tendency in the history of human marriage was the diminishment of legitimate sexual partners for men and for women as social evolution progressed, with the monogamous family as a final result, corresponding to the society of private property. Engels seems to have been so consumed with Morgan's discovery of collective kinship that he accepted the

latter's matriarchy thesis uncritically as being related directly to the collectivist organization of the primordial society. The only development that Engels added was material on the ancient Germans, Greeks and Romans. He also sharpened the materialistic interpretation, eliminating Morgan from the "last remnants of idealistic husk."

However, contrary to common opinion, Marx's view of the primordial society was far more complex than the simplistic versions of Morgan and Engels. Marx approached the subject more creatively. He acknowledged Morgan's great contribution to the theory of gens and their early egalitarian character, but unlike Morgan/Engels he did not state that matriarchy preceded patriarchy. Instead, it was Marx's view that the first social ranks and divisions did exist in classical collective kins. For Engels and Morgan these ranks and divisions appear only during the period of transformation of the kinship groups (kins) into class society (the so-called "military democracy period", according to Engels). It was this idea that was introduced into the ABC of Soviet anthropology. Marx also composed the comprehensive synopsis of Morgan's *Ancient Society*, in which he elaborated on the concepts of American anthropology's founding father (Krader 1974). Marx also intended to write a special study on this subject, emphasizing the conflict between families and gentes rather than the evolutionary sequence of patriarchy after matriarchy. On the contrary, Engels, claiming he was obliged to fulfill the will of his late friend to write the book on primordial society, followed Morgan more closely both in concept and even in terminology. This fact was already noted by scholars (Bloch 1983: 48; Dunaevskaya 1991: 181).

However, Marx's synopsis became known to researchers only in 1946 after it had appeared for the first time in Russian. By this time, however, in primordial studies, Engels'/Morgan's school of thought was dominant and absolutely opposed the main ideas expressed by Marx in his synopsis. Despite the aforementioned differences between Marx and Engels, both of them shared the common conviction that Morgan gave them ethnographic foundations for their own conceptions of collectivism in

the ancient kin society. "Why was this proof of the one-time existence of primitive communism so important to Marx?", Helen Constan asked in 1967 only to respond, "Because the fact that it had once existed in the past became a guarantee that it would surely once again exist in the future, through the working of the dialectic of history. The incorporation of Morgan thus served an important purpose for Marx: it intensified Marxist eschatology..." (*Proceedings of the Seventh International Anthropological Congress, IV, 1964*: 460).

In spite of the obvious elements of social evolutionism in his *Ancient Society*, Soviet Marxist authors specially stipulated that Morgan should not be placed in the company of other prominent evolutionists such as John Lubbock, Edward Taylor or Herbert Spencer. The reason for such an exception lies in Morgan's attempts to put technological progress at the core of societal development, the corner stone of the whole Marxist theory. He also recognized not only the gradual evolutionary sequence but the "qualitative leaps", and at the end of his classic treatise made a prophesy about the future disappearance of the contemporary society. Instead, he envisioned the development of a new structure resembling the former collectivist kins, or, in Morgan's own words, a society embodying 'a revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes' (Morgan 1985: 522). One Soviet author, Ter-Akopian, who conducted research on the role of "primitive communism" in Marx's and Engels' conceptions, even noted that Morgan was the first researcher into primordial society to express a socialist perspective in human society's development (Ter-Akopian 1991: 199).

Therefore, in view of Marxist authors, as an unintentional prophet responsible for the discovery of the essence of primordial society, Morgan stood apart from his own time and rose above all other contemporary thinkers (Ter-Akopian 1991: 28; Tokarev 1978: 59). In Soviet anthropological discourse even Morgan's pupils and followers, such as John W. Powell, were criticized for their deviation from the founding father's basic conceptions. Soviet authors depicted him as the thinker who possessed the true understanding of historical events, in con-

trast to his later evolutionist followers, who became "apologists of the American capitalism". It was the obvious contradiction with the Marxist principles themselves, which postulate the principle of historicism. Another prominent Soviet anthropologist wrote on the significance of Morgan for Marxist scholarship:

"It was the optimistic belief in the human being, in progress of society, and in triumph of reason, that is, in the victory of communist societal organization, that, most of all, brought Morgan's ideas closer to those of founders of Marxism, and most of all, gave this American scholar such high esteem" (Tokarev 1978: 62).

It is interesting to note the typical evolutionary, even Enlightenment terminology of this passage.

As is very well known, the development of social scholarship put evolutionism under strong criticism at the turn of the century. The new factual data broke the linear conception of development and pushed scholars to relativism. The Boasian Historical School provides the best example of this trend. "Father" Franz and his pupils concentrated their efforts on the study of specific cultures rather than on speculations about global development of mankind. Furthermore, relativists came to recognition of equality of all cultures, while evolutionists commonly shared the concept of their hierarchy. The language, methods and the manner of the materials' presentation in the works of Taylor, Morgan, Engels, and other social scholars of that time bore the natural markers of the epoch and could hardly "stand apart" from it. They more or less unanimously did their researches according to the established clichés. These studies usually represented "piles" of factual data sometimes picked up from distinct historical periods. Most probably Roman/ancient Greek chronicles and memoirs of European travelers to the "savage" areas served as the sources for such works, the latter providing the relevance for the former. The goal was to demonstrate the unity of development of ancient Europe and the modern "savages". This view, for its own time, constituted on the whole the new important step in social sciences, which refuted attempts to mod-

ernize history, conceptions of static/degeneration in the development of “undeveloped” peoples of that time. Later, however, the evolutionist ideas themselves encountered the challenge of relativist anthropology. The new positivist social scholarship primarily opposed two aspects of the old anthropology, the concept of matriarchy and the perceptions about the linear evolution of the society.

Soviet ethnology, nevertheless, absorbed many evolutionist doctrines and kept intact Morgan’s teaching in contrast to the change in world scholarship. In addition, in the Soviet Union, where Marxism was transformed into the state’s ideology, his concepts, in Frederick Engels’ version, became the standard theoretical model for the whole generation of anthropologists from the late 1920s. Through their studies they were supposed to provide only factual evidence for Morgan’s ideas. As one Soviet ethnological authority noted, “it seems there is no country like the Soviet Union where the name of Morgan is so popular” (*Proceedings of the Seventh International Anthropological Congress*, IV, 1964: 492).

## Russian perceptions of Morgan’s writings

In the second half of the last century, prior to the establishment of his authority in the Soviet scholarship, Morgan’s kinship conception had large appeal for Russian scholars of liberal and democratic orientation. Among them were such prominent researchers and thinkers as the sociologists Maksim M. Kovalevski, Peter Lavrov, the anthropologists Nikolai Ziber and Leo Y. Sterenberg. Incidentally, it was Maksim Kovalevski who, being on friendly terms with Karl Marx, introduced him for the first time to Morgan’s classic *Ancient Society*. At that time the book was relatively little known in Europe (Kovalevski 1909: 11). The attention towards Morgan and the evolutionism seems to have contained more than purely academic interest. Morgan’s ideas on the linear progress, that finally leads to the restoration of the communal forms of life, provided additional support for the arguments about inevitable movement of the society to a better collectivist future.

While at the turn of the century, in European countries and the United States, Morgan’s conceptions as well as evolutionary theory on the whole lost their influence, in Russia these ideas continued to dominate a large part of anthropological research. Apparently, we might partially explain this situation by the fact that Russian social scholarship lagged behind Western theory: the indirect reflection of the general underdevelopment of the society and economy. In anthropology only oral ethnography and folklore experienced the strong influence of the “historical school”. In other fields the evolutionism remained the major academic tool. Tokarev illustrated this fact by the dynamic of translations of main Western anthropological works in Russia. In the pre-evolutionary period we could hardly find any book translations discussing ethnology. Later on, at the second half of the last century, all major treatises of Western evolutionists became available for the Russian audience. However, at the turn of the century, when relativism and agnosticism replaced evolutionism with its ideas of progress, the significant part of the Russian scholarly community lost interest in the contemporary works of Western anthropologists, and the translation work stopped. As a result, the relationships between Russian and Western anthropology loosened (Tokarev 1966: 361). “Russia was the only country, where his teaching [Morgan’s] was accepted and received further creative development”, proudly wrote Mark Kosven, a very influential popularizer of the Morgan’s matriarchy theory from the 1930s to the 1950s (Ter-Akopian 1991: 32). Furthermore, it is interesting to note that after the first publication of *Ancient Society* in the United States, two translations were printed, one in Germany in 1891, and the other in Russia. It is peculiar that the Russian translator used this German text as the original, and Morgan’s treatise in the Russian variant had the title *Primitive Society*.

The first Russian scholar to employ Morgan’s ideas for his research was Nikolai Ziber, whose views stood closely to Marxism. At first, he taught at the Kiev University, then moved to Switzerland, where he spent much of his academic career. In 1883 he published *Essays on History of Primitive Economic Culture*, where,

focusing on the economy of “primitive communism”, in a typical evolutionary manner he attempted to provide abundant factual evidence in support of the matriarchy thesis and collective essence of the primordial society. Ziber extensively used Morgan’s periodization of human progress and even his terminology. Praising Morgan and other evolutionists with similar views, he argues that the subject of matriarchy had received such deep analysis that it no longer demanded any new theoretical reevaluation. “All our tasks for future research,” he stressed, “include, on the one hand, accumulation of a quantity of factual materials confirming the collective kin theory, and, on the other, insights into the economic basis of various kin unions” (Ziber 1883: 291). He even formulated his summary remarks at the end of the book as a carbon copy of the *Ancient Society’s* concluding prophecy: “We may doubtlessly come to the conclusion that the new type of commodity slavery created by capitalism for industrial purposes represents the most hateful and vilest form that has ever existed”. It was somehow possible, he continued, to justify the ancient forms of slavery, in Rome or Greece, rather than to rationalize “capitalist slavery”, “enrichment of the class of civilized monsters” (Ibid.: 504).

In some respects, he came up as the predecessor of Frederick Engels, since Ziber, having finished his study in 1881, became the first European apologist of “primitive communism” prior to the appearance of the *Origin of Family*. “The scientific significance of Ziber’s work”, stated Tokarev, “is especially considerable since he for the first time posed a question about the character of production relationships, property forms in the primitive pre-class society, the problem, which neither Morgan nor Engels clearly defined” (Tokarev 1966: 355). Therefore, it was natural that in the Soviet Union Ziber’s *Essays* had come out twice, in 1923 and in 1937 (Nikolski 1929: 15; Tokarev 1966: 355).

The well-known scholar, Maksim Kovalevski, was also exposed to Morgan’s ideas for a long time. Soviet historiography depicted him as a “bourgeois positivist influenced by Marxism” because at first he was friends with Marx and Engels, and later left his radical views. Kova-

levski focused primarily on the comparative analysis of communal forms of ownership in different cultures. In addition, he wrote a few works on the disintegration of kin society. However, the major role here belongs to Leo Y. Sterenberg, who academically and administratively contributed to the formation of the early Soviet anthropological scholarship through his numerous students. He started his own research at the end of the last century in Russian Far East, where he was in exile for his revolutionary activities. Sterenberg analyzed kinship systems of the Siberian indigenous peoples, and the Nivkh people of the Sakhalin Island in particular.

Specifically, he discovered the remnants of the so-called “group marriage” among Sakhalin and Amur River natives. This type of marriage, according to Morgan/Engels, constituted a step towards the formation of a monogamous family. Engels even translated Sterenberg’s paper on this topic for a German social-democratic magazine, and praised in his notes this support of Morgan’s conceptions. Moreover, Sterenberg became acquainted with *Ancient Society’s* theories through Engels’ *Origin* while serving a short prison term in an Odessa city prison (Sterenberg 1933: X). At the same time, as the shift in ideas towards relativism occurred, a small group of Russian scholars started to reconsider “matriarchy” and “primitive communism” under the stress of new ethnographic data. For example, Kovalevski, who traveled and lived abroad for a long time, became one of the first prominent scholars to share this heresy. Despite this, in 1905 he wrote that matrilineal kinship had dominated the native life all over the Western Hemisphere, and could also be found on Madagascar and the Tonga Islands (Butinov 1965: 181).

## Soviet absorption of Morgan

The very character of the Morgan’s evolutionary concept, universality, totality, and finally its eschatological essence, had strong appeal for the Soviet totalitarian scholarship. Tolstov, the leading Stalinist anthropologist and an administrative “bloodthirsty turk” (Slezkine 1991: 479), stressed in 1946:

“Uncompromised struggle for the Morgan tradition in anthropology, for raising our scholarship to the highest level, for genuine introduction of scientific methodology of Marxism-Leninism into anthropological studies represent a characteristic feature of the development of anthropology in our country” (Tolstov 1946: 7).

Another scholar, popular in the Soviet anthropological establishment in the 1960s and 1970s, continued:

“One can come to the objective truth only going along the road laid by L.H. Morgan and Frederick Engels. All other ways only leads to the deviation from the creation of unified and genuine teaching about primordial society” (Semenov 1968: 184).

It should be noted that Soviet anthropology allowed and even demanded modifications of Morgan's/Engels' views. But this reevaluation concerned only minor details, the general principles were assumed to be above any criticism. Thus, from the 1940s to 1960s Soviet scholars basically left alone Morgan's speculations about particular forms of kinship evolution (so-called “group marriage”, “panulua family”, etc.), which anthropological observations never proved. Engels himself indicated that Morgan's concepts would demand corrections in the spirit of new ethnographic data. However, it was also Engels who defined the limits for this future revisionism, adding that reevaluation should not concern Morgan's basics: collectivism of the primordial society and matriarchy. According to Tolstov, “we consider the basic postulations of Morgan's teaching about the primitive society to be strongly verified” (Tolstov 1946: 10), and in the “spirit of Engels and Lenin” he provided the Marxist periodization of the primordial society:

1. The epoch of primitive herd, when the man and the very structure of the society had not yet been formed.
2. The classic gentes (kin) society of “primitive communism”.
3. The “military democracy” stage (the term belonging to Engels), of transition from the

primordial society to the society of rudimentary classes/ranks. Earlier Morgan's periodization formulated the following stages:

1. “Savagery”, when people subsisted mainly on wild life.
2. “Barbarity”, the period of the initial forms of cultivation and production.
3. “Political society” or civilization: the appearance of private property, state, government, etc.

Morgan connected radical changes in societal development with various technological inventions. Praising him for this novelty, nevertheless, Soviet Marxists considered that view “immature”. It was Frederick Engels who, having connected primitive technology with people's relations in the process of production, was credited for the “deep” elaboration on ideas contained in *Ancient Society*. However, on the whole, the Soviet anthropology viewed Morgan's concepts as extremely relevant for the contemporary scholarship, especially such aspects as collectivist nature of the primordial society, lack of individual families and movement from matriarchy to patriarchy as the reflection of transition from the classless society to a slavery/feudal structure. According to Julia Averkieva, one of the ardent proponents of “matriarchy thesis”, all primordial studies consist of two absolutely different periods: before the appearance of *Ancient Society* and Engels' *Origin*, and after publication of these works (Averkieva 1979: 11). In this sense, Morgan's ideas really became “The Book of Genesis” for Soviet anthropology.

Furthermore, until the early 1980s Soviet ethnological “output” even in form, shape and content strongly reminded the classical evolutionist works of the nineteenth century. In addition, Soviet scholars hardly practiced anthropological case and community studies, which unavoidably could lead to the relativist view of culture and society. Instead, scholarship canon demanded universal approaches, and as a result, numerous generalization studies mushroomed in anthropological research. From ideological positions, the officialdom of the Soviet ethnology rebuked all attempts to reevaluate the basics of the kin theory. Scholars who tried to argue that matriarchy not necessarily repre-

sented collectivist kin structure of the primordial society not necessarily constituted the connotation of matriarchy received labels of “imitators of bourgeois thought” and “revisionists”. In the totalitarian scholarship the latter word lacked the neutral meaning it has in the Western academic community. In the Soviet ethnological discourse the collectivist essence of the early society became the synonym of matriarchy and vice-versa. Therefore, any challenge to this concept was treated as a defense of individualism and private property that directly led to the apology of exploitation. One of the authors, who specialized in writing theoretical studies on primordality, stated:

“... while Scientific Communism received through the historical research of primitive society genuine evidence on inevitable doom of capitalism, the apologists of anti-communism naturally had to make attempts to reconsider these data” (Pershitz 1967: 17).

Therefore, like in the other fields of Soviet social scholarship, the academic polemics between Marxists and relativists transferred into a politico-ideological dispute. The appearance of major translations of Morgan’s works in Russian in the first half of the 1930s was not accident. The consolidation of the Soviet totalitarian regime at this time also concerned unification and standardization of humanities and social sciences. In 1933 Mark Kosven published a biographical study of Morgan. The next year translations of *Ancient Society* and *Houses and House Life of American Aborigines* came out. Besides, in 1935, after careful preliminary work, a part of Morgan’s correspondence was published (Kosven 1933; Morgan 1934; Morgan 1934a). Furthermore, in 1937–1938 Elena Blomkvist, a Soviet student of Native Americans, translated into Russian his classic *League of Iroquois*. However, the book did not appear in Russia until 1983 (Morgan 1983). We may presume that *League* with its numerous “immature idealist flaws” obviously did not represent a useful ideological tool for Soviet anthropology.

The editor of *Houses and House Life*, introducing this work to the Russian reader, expressed strong hope that all Soviet anthropolo-

gists would use Morgan’s works as books of ready reference:

“In our time, when the primitive communism issue acquired large theoretical and political significance, when bourgeois and social-fascist scholarships are united in their furious malice against teaching on primitive communism, not avoiding in their struggle a direct falsification of facts, the appearance of *Houses and House Life* in Russian will play an important role because it will provide high quality material on the communistic character of primitive tribes” (Morgan 1934a: VIII).

This ideological discourse gave the official ethnology a good opportunity to refute all present and future challenges to the established ideas since, from an ideological point of view, to criticize the relativist conceptions of such scholars as Bronislaw Malinowski or Franz Boas by means of simple academic polemics was not an easy task. This criticism unavoidably could lead to the plurality of views, lack of ideological correctness or theoretical unification. Therefore, it was better to state that “bourgeois professors” intentionally distorted ethnographic materials to attack Morgan’s conceptions, which in turn was a challenge to Marxism. Soviet anthropologists, who specialized in criticism of the “bourgeois ethnology,” even emphasized that Morgan’s books “officially” or intentionally were silenced in the United States. This was an bizarre attempt to ascribe to Western scholarship the same canons, which dominated in Soviet ethnology.

Lenin’s view about the degeneration of the whole Western thought from the beginning of the century provided the starting point for the criticism of all “bourgeois theories”. According to Lenin, the decline of belief in ideas of progress reflected the general decay of the capitalist society that came into its last stage, imperialism, the eve of the socialist revolution. In other words, everything that came after the invention of Marxism carried a stamp of degeneration. Consequently, scholars who did not share Marxist views were considered the defenders of declining society.

In his biography of Morgan Mark Kosven

stressed that “struggle against Morgan’s conceptions, this “struggle of ideas” is the simple reflection of class struggle” (Kosven 1933: 68). Moreover, Averkieva, who dedicated all her theoretical and topical writings to the defense of Morgan’s heritage<sup>3</sup>, even stated that “historically and philosophically, these scholars [Morgan’s evolutionist followers in the United States] represented more mature thinkers than American anthropologists of the twentieth century” (Averkieva 1979: 65). Challenging such views, an American participant of the 1967 Congress of Anthropological Sciences in Moscow rightly compared Morgan’s role in ethnology with that of Lamark in Biology – we should respect him as a pioneer, but it would be absurd to speculate on what current scholarship could get from his teaching (*Proceedings of the Seventh International Anthropological Congress*, IV, 1964: 484).

However, considering the American attitudes towards Morgan, we should not forget that from the 1960s onward, with the general rise of left, left-liberal ideas, and the growth of popularity of Marxist concepts in the academic community, a few scholars made attempts to reassess his conceptions, stressing their relevance to the contemporary scholarship. However, as Adam Kuper noted, in the American anthropological tradition debates about Morgan primarily evolve around his kinship theory (Kuper 1988: 74). Trautmann’s study (1987), for example, provides an illustration of this approach. In recent scholarship Robert Bieder seems to have provided the best brief analysis of Morgan’s place in the history of American anthropology (Bieder 1986: 245–246). But these attempts certainly has nothing to do with the ideological approach of the former Soviet ethnology, which developed another tradition, inaugurated by Engels, which concerned with social evolution and the “origin of the state”. In the same way, the appearance of neo-evolutionism in American anthropology became a reaction against extremes of relativism rather than a return to Morgan’s ideas in their classic form.

The Soviet ethnological establishment also made insistent attempts to link the very personality of Morgan with his “communistic ideas” to make the utopian consistency complete. At first, from the biographical study by Kosven,

who borrowed basic assessments of Morgan’s personality from another Morgan’s biographer, Theodore Stern, it became common to depict the founder of American ethnology as a contradictory person. On the one hand, he was a “bourgeois”, “capitalist” who by tradition demonstrated his religious piety. On the other, in contrast to many of his contemporaries, “vicious unscrupulous professors”, he displayed “academic honesty”, and came to the “natural” conclusions in the spirit of “spontaneous materialism”. Thomas Trautmann neatly remarked that “Morgan’s charm for Marx was exactly that he was a “Yankee Republican” and a capitalist, in that his contributions were therefore beyond suspicions (Trautmann 1987: 255).

Incidentally, Soviet social scholarship often used such arguments about “spontaneity” of “honest bourgeois scholars” to prove the “scientific character” of Marxism-Leninism or better to say, the Soviet totalitarian version of Marxism. This assessment of Morgan dominated in Soviet anthropology until the mid-1960s, when Semenov attempted to reconsider this view. As is known, in the late 1950s Leslie White, a major and consistent proponent of Morgan concepts in the United States, published large part of his correspondence and diaries. One can learn from these materials that Morgan had been rather active in Indian affairs, in addition to his defense of the Iroquois in his youth. Diaries also exposed his critical approach towards the United States Indian policy and European ruling circles. This social criticism evidently did not go beyond the normal liberal attitude to the governmental policies of the period.

However, the temptation to link the personality of the scholar with his “communistic” conceptions was irresistible. In connection with the 150th anniversary of Morgan’s birthday Semenov made such an attempt. While Kosven depicted him as an ordinary bourgeois, Semenov went to the other extreme, calling Morgan a “revolutionary democrat”. In the Marxist-Leninist jargon this assessment meant that a person approached very closely towards “genuine” Marxist teaching. Following this logic, Semenov even stated that after the mid-1870s Morgan made a crucial step towards Commun-



nism! (Semenov 1968: 23–24). The author picked up all available harsh quotations and critical statements of Morgan about contemporary society, and built a consistent chain of his “natural” drift towards “socialist orientation”. Having failed to find in his writings and notes critical comments directly relating to the American political system, Semenov widely employed Morgan’s European diaries.

In these notes Morgan strongly criticized European aristocracy, church bureaucracy and expressed sympathetic feelings to the Paris Commune revolutionaries massacred by the French military in 1870. At the same time, in the same comments he praised American democracy! These remarks forced Semenov to produce additional explanations. Otherwise, the “integrity” of Morgan’s personality could have fallen apart. The Soviet ideologist found his way out, speculating about Morgan’s supposed homesickness for the United States during his long travel across Europe and his belief in so-called “American agrarian Communism”. Helen Constanas was right arguing that this supposed “inconsistency” in the afore mentioned views, in reality, presents evidence that Morgan in his notes stood for the equality of opportunities rather than against private property (*Proceedings of the Seventh International Anthropological Congress. Moscow, IV, 1967: 457*). In this context, his harsh statements against European aristocracy find reasonable explanation.

## The Prophet reconsidered

Later, after a slight destalinization, a large number of Soviet anthropologists raised on Morgan’s/Engels’ ideas, continued to demonstrate their adherence to these views. Matriarchy and collectivism of the “primitive society” were considered untouchable. However, from the beginning of the 1960s there appeared first scholars who attempted to reevaluate both details and corner stones of Morgan’s conception. The important role in this process belonged to the 7th World Anthropological Congress held in Moscow, where Soviet anthropologists for the first time were widely exposed to the variety of Western theories. Soviet and Western partici-

pants even organized a special session exclusively on the significance of Morgan’s heritage for the contemporary scholarship. It is also important that the complete texts of these debates became available to the Soviet audience, which could form its own opinion of primordial studies without anybody’s interpretations.

Prior to and after the congress a group of scholars from the Moscow Institute of Ethnography attempted to publish results of their research, where they found the lack of matrilineal kinship in the cultures under consideration. One of them, N.A. Butinov, a student of traditional society of New Guinea, indirectly started to rethink Morgan’s matriarchy. He expressed his views in a monograph *The Origin and Ethnic Composition of Native Population of New Guinea* (Butinov 1962). Major anthropological purists, Julia Averkieva, A. Pershitz, Leo Fainberg, and N. Cheboksarov, delivered a strong ideological rebuke to Butinov’s book, blatantly stating that Soviet ethnology would not accept the sociological schemes of Western anthropology. Moreover, they continued, “Butinov’s work worried wide circles of Soviet anthropologists.” That response also contained a direct conviction, “The author [Butinov] drifted to the camp of direct opponents of Marxist teaching about primordality” (Averkieva, Pershitz, et al. 1963: 201). Butinov carried on a polemic with his critics within the strict limits of Marxist discourse, the established rules of the game in Soviet totalitarian scholarship. He specifically expressed doubts over the direct connection between the collectivist nature of the “primitive society” and matriarchy since his own research showed that New Guinea people lived in collective kin communities within the patrilineal kinship system.

His opponents attempted to assert that patriarchy constituted the later institution, a logical consequence of the colonizers’ influences on the natives. They also blamed him for extending specific Australian and New Guinea cases to the primordial society’s history as a whole. Summarizing the results of the polemic, the editorial board of *Soviet Ethnography*, the official journal of Soviet anthropology, stated in typical ideological clichés:

"We want to avoid the comparing of quotations belonging to the founders of Marxism. In our opinion, it is rather well known that Engels considered matrilineal kin as preceding to patriarchy and Lenin did not oppose this view as well" (*Sovetskaya Etnografia* 1965: 187).

In similar cases, after such conclusions all debates were considered to be finished. However, two other anthropologists, V.N. Bahkta and V.R. Kabo took the side of Butinov. They began arguing the diversified character of primordial communities based both on kin and territorial structures. Incidentally, all three scholars specialized in anthropology of the Pacific region (Bloch 1983: 116).

Defenders of Morgan's thesis in their own case studies attempted to challenge the revisionist views. For example, Averkieva (1974) in her book *North American Indians. From Kin to Class Society* employed Native American anthropology to assert the early matrilineal organization of all American Indian nations. Using the traditional Marxist-evolutionist discourse, she (like Morgan and Engels) utilized Greek and Roman chronicles as well as comparative data on Ancient Asia's nomads. In addition, she dedicated a special chapter to criticism of the Boasian "historical school" and contemporary neo-evolutionism in the United States. However, at the turn of the 1970s Soviet ethnology was gradually losing its ideological consistency. Working in the limits of Marxist tradition, anthropologists started to bring relativist concepts into their concrete research. Besides, the "primitive communism factor" lost a large part of its ideological significance. The very expression "primitive communism" disappeared from all major books and reference editions in the 1960s and 1970s (Ter-Akopian 1991: 163). Writings, that still used this cliché, put it into quotation marks.

Interestingly enough, from the 1930s to 1970s the strength of ideological attacks on revisionists of Morgan softened as the totalitarian grips loosened. Let's compare, for example, two discourses. In 1933 attacking Robert Lowie Kosven used the following words, "Current official American ethnology under the leadership of its recognized chief, self-satisfied and frivolous,

Robert Lowie, who became famous for being the first to crusade against Morgan in America, directs all its efforts to overthrow the teaching about kin." However, in the 1970s Averkieva, one of the Marxist purists of the Soviet anthropology, already wrote, "In 1919 one new theoretician [Lowie] of the historical school came up with an attempt to prove the primordially of patriarchy. Generalizing the opinions of his colleagues, he pointed out that American ethnology considers the question of the historical relationship of matrilineal and patrilineal institutions closed" (Kosven 1933: 66; Averkieva 1974: 15–16).<sup>4</sup>

By the mid-1980s a greater part of Soviet scholars de facto refuted Morgan's/Engels' conceptions. Only a small number of scholars, who made their carries through the criticism of so-called "Western revisionists in anthropology" continued to put forward arguments in favor of "primitive communism" as a mandatory socio-economic formation through which all peoples passed at different time periods before embracing the class society. Some of these scholars nowadays try to shadow their past ideological campaigns, stating that they had been motivated exclusively by "pure scholarship" (see Semenov 1992: 31).

Incidentally, the current criticism of the totalitarian heritage in Russian anthropology represents additional interest. The attempts to defy remnants of Soviet ethnology are carried on in a typical Russian manner, with traditional extremes. For instance, the current Director of the Moscow Ethnological Institute asserts that Russian anthropology should be radically reshaped according to Western concepts (German, American?). Today Russian anthropology, earlier called "Ethnography", even changed its name to "Ethnology". A few critics of such measures rightly observed that these drastic attempts might destroy some positive features of the scholarship, for example its historical approach (Shnirelman 1992: 390).

The treatment of Morgan's ideas in Russia provides an illustration of the "applied" and "practical" attitude to science and social scholarship in the Russian tradition, which had designed scientific knowledge to promote certain "just cause". This role dramatically in-

creased in the Soviet totalitarian society, where Anthropology started to serve ideological goals of the government. Taken out of its historic epoch and specific context, Morgan's ideas started to play an absolutely different role at a different time. In a similar way, many other scholarship concepts brought from the West to the Russian/Soviet soil shared the similar fate.

## Notes

1. For example, in 1976 during an East-West anthropological conference Julia P. Averkieva argued that the major goal of Soviet anthropologists was to provide materials proving the established Marxist-Leninist concept of historicism: see Averkieva (1980: 19).
2. Incidentally, Yuri Slezkine was the first who discussed in his dissertation the ideologization of Soviet anthropology in the 1920s and 1930s: see Slezkine (1989).
3. Averkieva's academic "journey" in the Stalin and post-Stalinist environment seems to reflect the hardships of the whole generation of Soviet social scholars of the 1930–1950s. In the beginning of her career this talented anthropologist worked with Franz Boas and authored many interesting Marxist studies on the transition of the Northwest Coast Indians from the kin society to the class-based structure (Averkieva 1966; 1971; 1992). Stamped as an "unloyal" and "suspicious" scholar, who traveled abroad, later in the end of the 1940s she had to go through Stalin's concentration camps. Evidently, Averkieva as many of her colleagues, falsely accused in various "crimes", by their orthodox and dogmatic Marxism, attempted to convince everybody in their loyalty. See a short biographical sketch of Averkieva in Mark A. Sherman's "Introduction" to Averkieva (1992: XVII–XX).
4. It is also interesting to observe how militant ideological discourse that purists used to criticize their home opponents (in this case Butinov) softened from the early 1960s to the second half of the 1970s; compare, for example, Averkieva, Pershitz, a.o. (1963) with Pershitz (1980).

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