

BOOK REVIEWS/КНИЖНЫЕ РЕЦЕНЗИИ

Katy Turton. *Forgotten Lives: The Role of Lenin's Sisters in the Russian Revolution, 1864-1937*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007. 257 pp. \$79.95. ISBN: 978-230007628.

Katy Turton is to be highly commended for undertaking this project to illuminate the lives of Vladimir Il'ich (Ul'ianov) Lenin's sisters Anna Il'inichna Ul'ianova-Elizarova and Mariia Il'inichna Ul'ianova, both of them dedicated party and government workers who were nearly as overlooked in their own day as they have been ever since, in Western historiography at least. Bolshevik memoirists as well as Western biographers of Lenin have consistently presented (or derided) the first Soviet leader's sisters as invisible, irrelevant, unattractive and/or hysterical. Although Soviet works of the post-Stalin era developed what Turton terms "mini-cults" around Anna and Mariia to complement the revived Lenin cult, the Soviet emphasis on their sisterly admiration for and support of Lenin was not only accepted at face-value in the West but also considered reason to dismiss these women as negligible in the historical record.

To summarize their heretofore unstudied or understudied lives, Anna and Mariia were both university-educated intellectuals, proficient writers of letters and articles, zealous revolutionaries and devoted sisters to their brother Vladimir, on whose political mission they centered their lives. Therefore, they were also his loyal and trusted, perhaps his most loyal and trusted, party and government comrades. Mariia, who never married, lived with Vladimir and his wife Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaiia from 1917 until Lenin's death in 1924, while Anna, who married fellow Bolshevik Mark Timofeevich Elizarov, usually lived close by and maintained daily contact. Whenever she was away from the family, Anna wrote to her sister regularly, the greater substance of her letters concerning, of course, their brother Vladimir and his life's work.

Anna, Vladimir and Mariia were born to progressive, middle-class parents living in Simbirsk province; their mother was the daughter of a physician of Jewish descent, while their father, the son of a liberated serf, through education had risen to become a teacher and eventually an inspector of schools. Turton's account of the Ul'ianov family offers a fascinating perspective on Lenin's upbringing by distinguishing three sets of "twins" among the six siblings: Anna and Aleksandr, born in 1864 and 1866; Vladimir and Ol'ga, born in 1870 and 1871; and Dmitrii and Mariia, born in 1874 and 1878. Each brother-sister pair functioned as closest companions and playmates, interacting less intensively with the other siblings. Anna and Aleksandr, both serious and reserved individuals, were the leaders who set and modeled family behavior for the younger children. Vladimir and Ol'ga, the middle pair, were more mischievous and boisterous, whereas Dmitrii and Mariia's distance from the oldest pair in years relegated them to playing lesser roles in family culture.

According to Anna's own portrayal of Ul'ianov family history, it was the execution of their older brother Aleksandr in 1887 for involvement in a terrorist plot against Tsar Aleksandr III that "strongly revolutionized" the middle siblings Vladimir and Ol'ga (p. 24); Anna herself, though unaware of the plot, was arrested and administratively exiled because her brother had used her "clean" address to contact a co-conspirator. Ol'ga reportedly swore to take up Aleksandr's terrorist mission and was moving in radical student circles at the time of her death from typhoid fever in 1891. Vladimir became a Marxist, as did Anna, Dmitrii and Mariia in his wake; however, while Lenin generally rejected terrorism as a revolutionary tactic, my own research indicates that he respected – or recognized as politically useful – SR terrorists of popular renown such as Mariia Aleksandrovna Spiridonova, whose support he courted throughout the short-lived Bolshevik-Left SR alliance of late 1917-early 1918.

Here, however, I am not only being swept off-track by the perpetually vexing enigma of Lenin and his motives but also going well beyond what Turton has to say in her monograph – indeed, committing the traditional sin of Western historians by allowing Lenin to eclipse his sisters in my review. Turton's is a compact yet substantive study, loaded with intriguing details, but it could perhaps have taken a more ambitious approach and attempted a more pointed analysis of the many significant issues that it raises: for example, the pattern of Ul'ianov family dominance by the oldest surviving male, by no means atypical in a patriarchal culture; the effect of Aleksandr's death on his siblings and the trajectory of their political careers; and the contribution of these revolution-minded siblings' communications network to Lenin's rise in the Marxist party.

Providing a broader and deeper context would also have been helpful; the author assumes a reader well acquainted with the twists and turns of Russian history. The lack of context most undermines the chapters concerning the revolutions of 1917 and the early Soviet government under Lenin. The chapter covering the birth of Soviet power under Lenin's leadership through Lenin's collapse from a series of strokes in 1922 would also benefit from a sharper analysis of the sisters' contribution and influence in this formative period. Both women were awarded high-level positions in the Soviet administration, Anna becoming head of the Department for the Protection of Childhood and Mariia executive secretary of the party newspaper *Pravda* (in both cases, appointments to what might be considered "women's work," like Aleksandra Mikhailovna Kollontai's appointment as Commissar of Social Welfare); in addition, Mariia emerged as a sponsor and leader of the Worker Correspondent (Rabkor) movement. The author seems to imply that in 1917-22, Anna, six years Lenin's senior, was the more original and individualistic sister while Mariia, eight years Lenin's junior, tended to work in her brother's shadow, following in his path and hewing to his line, but it is left to the reader to form a definite conclusion.

The next two chapters, which examine the sisters' experiences in the New Economic Policy (NEP) and early Stalinist eras, are more compelling and indeed evoke much empathy for Mariia, who like Lenin's widow, her sister-in-law Krupskaja, became entangled in the labyrinthine politics of Stalin's rise to power,

whereas Anna, widowed in 1919, withdrew from the public arena as her age and ill health increased. In 1921, following the disbandment of the Department for the Protection of Childhood, Anna was invited to work at the Commission on the History of the October Revolution and the Russian Communist Party (Istpart). The writings she produced for Istpart and its journal *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia* (The Workers' Revolution) demonstrated both her loyalty to the official Bolshevik/Communist party line and her honesty about "certain aspects of the revolutionary movement" beyond Istpart's definition of party history, according to Turton (pp. 100-101). However, Anna escaped the heated intra-party controversies in which her sister would become embroiled by retiring from Istpart in 1926, before the NEP era's limited openness about historicizing the revolution gave way to the Stalinist reconstruction of revolutionary history and the consequent removal of the Old Bolsheviks from it.

In the intensifying intra-party debates during the latter years of the New Economic Policy, Mariia Ul'ianova made an enemy of Iosif Vissarionich (Djugashvili) Stalin by continuing to support the pro-NEP position of Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin after Stalin, Bukharin's ally in the mid-1920s, shifted to the opposing side in 1928. Mariia had been allying with Stalin on party issues ever since her brother's health deteriorated in 1922, even when Lenin was critical of Stalin's stance. After Lenin's death, it was Stalin who instructed Mariia on the proper line for *Pravda* to take; in return, she received Stalin's assistance in all matters concerning *Pravda*. In 1925, when Lenin's widow Krupskaja gave vocal support to the anti-NEP movement at the fourteenth party congress, Lenin's sister Mariia spoke on behalf of Stalin and his pro-NEP ally Bukharin. Nevertheless, Mariia's ties to Bukharin, her comrade in the pre-revolutionary underground as well as her colleague at *Pravda* and in the Rabkor movement, were stronger than her allegiance to Stalin, Turton argues; thus Mariia did not desert her old friend when Stalin turned against him in 1928. For their failure to support Stalin, both Mariia and her sister-in-law Krupskaja endured intra-party disgrace and punishment in the form of smear campaigns. Mariia also lost her positions at *Pravda* and on the Rabkor board but was awarded the more innocuous task of collecting and editing her brother's letters at the Lenin Institute, in an office shared with Krupskaja.

If Stalin had intended thus to consign Mariia to political obscurity, along with her sister Anna, whom he had earlier assigned the job of researching Ul'ianov family history, his strategy failed; rather, Turton maintains, their "becoming the keepers of Lenin's memory . . . raised the sisters' public profile even further" (p. 137). After Lenin's death in 1924 until their own deaths in the mid-1930s, Anna's in 1935 and Mariia's in 1937, both women produced considerable biographical material on their brother and were generous donors of their time and treasures to Lenin museums and memorials. Overall, Turton finds Anna's writings on Lenin to be more balanced than Mariia's, which, she says, tended to mythologize their brother. But because the published works of both sisters emphasized Lenin's singularity and their own submissive, even domestic roles in his life, it strikes me that they themselves created the imagery around which their mini-personality cults of the post-Stalin period would be based.

An honest assessment of Anna and Mariia Ul'ianova's contribution to Soviet history cannot deny that their relation to Lenin brought them to positions of power in the new Soviet administration they otherwise may not have achieved, neither of them being a published theorist or charismatic speaker on the order of Kollontai. Moreover, after Lenin's death, his sisters lost their political influence but were accorded status as expert interpreters of the first Soviet leader's life and character. Although Turton debunks "the solar system myth" by which Soviet and Western historians alike have depicted Anna and Mariia as adoring planets orbiting the magnificent sun of their brother, that the sisters' admirably energetic and hardworking lives did so center on Lenin and his vision of revolution seems to me the reality.

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