The "Doctors' Plot"

Snyder spends more space on this event than on any other in this chapter. He gets virtually everything wrong, as he has so many times before. It is hard to believe that Snyder has studied the Doctors' Plot himself. He appears to rely instead on the extremely anticommunist and incompetent secondary accounts by Brent and Naumov, and by Arno Lustiger. But Snyder, not they, is responsible for what goes into his book.

> Shcherbakov had died the day after he had insisted, against doctors' orders, on taking part in a Victory Day parade. (363)

Source (n. 39 p. 503): "On the Victory Day parade, see Brandenberger, "Last Crime," 193."

Brandenberger simply repeats what Brent/Naumov say: that Shcherbakov ignored the doctors' advice to remain in bed — he had suffered a heart attack on December 1944 — and instead went out to view the Victory Day celebrations and died of another heart attack the next day, May 10, 1945. But neither Branderberger nor Brent/Naumov cite any evidence for their contention that Shcherbakov ignored the doctors' advice.

A.N. Ponomarev, author of the only full-length biography of Shcherbakov, had access to evidence from the Moscow Party archive and from the Shcherbakov family. Ponomarev states that Shcherbakov went to the celebration *with his doctors' permission*:

> Вечером (**врачи не возражали**) Александр Сергеевич в сопровождении жены приехал с дачи в столицу, побывал на улицах и площадях, порадовался вместе с москвичами долгожданной победе.[19]

Translated:

> In the evening **(the doctors did not object**) Aleksandr Sergeevich together with his wife drove from his dacha to the capital, spent a while on the streets and in the squares, rejoicing together with the Muscovites over the long-awaited victory.

Ponomarev is honest enough to admit that he is not certain about this, since the testimony came years a few years later during the investigation of the Doctors' Plot. How, then, can Brandenberger, Brent/Naumov, and Snyder claim *without qualification* that Shcherbakov's doctors *did* object?

In the case of Zhdanov things are clearer, and again Snyder gets them wrong:

> Zhdanov, too, had ignored doctors' orders to rest. (363)

This can only be a deliberate falsehood either by Snyder or by his source. Snyder cites the Brent/Naumov book so he must know that

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[19] A.N. Ponomarev. *Aleksandr Shcherbakov. Stranitsy biografii.* M: Izd. Glavarkhiva Moskvy, 2004, p. 275.

even this dishonest book discusses how the doctors in charge of treating Zhdanov allowed him to leave his bed and walk around despite the fact that the consulting cardiologist, Dr. Lidia Timashuk, determined that Zhdanov had suffered a recent heart attack and recommended strict bed rest.

There Really Was a "Doctors' Plot" Against Zhdanov

In fact there was indeed a conspiracy among Zhdanov's doctors to mistreat Zhdanov: to deny that he had suffered not just one heart attack but two recent ones and possibly a third the month before; to ignore the diagnosis of Dr. Timashuk, the cardiologist, and therefore to allow Zhdanov to get out of bed. The direct result of this was Zhdanov's death. Gennady Kostyrchenko quotes from Dr. Vinogradov's note to Beria on March 27, 1953:

> Все же необходимо признать, что у А.А. Жданова имелся инфаркт, и отрицание его мною, профессорами Василенко, Егоровым, докторами Майоровым и Карпай было с нашей стороны ошибкой. При этом злого умысла в постановке диагноза и метода лечения у нас не было."[20]

Translated:

> All the same, it must be admitted that A.A. Zhdanov did have a heart attack and the denial of this fact by myself, professor Vasilenko and Egorov, and doctors Maiorov and Karpai was a mistake on our part. We had no evil intention in making our diagnosis and our treatment.

Brent and Naumov claim to have had access to an even earlier document in which Vinogradov makes the same admission:

> On November 18, 1952, Vinogradov was still able to deny a premeditated plot to kill Zhdanov: "I allowed a mistake in the diagnosis that led to grave consequences and then to [Zhdanov's] death. There was

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[20] *Tainaia politika Stalina. Vlast' i antisemitizm* (2003), 642.

> no evil plan in my action ... I want only to repeat that at the basis of this crime, its original source, was medical error that I allowed as a consultant, leading the treatment of A.A. Zhdanov. (Brent/Naumov, 231)

A semi-official collection of documents cites the following original:

> Я признаю, что по моей вине жизнь А.А. Жданова была сокращена. При лечении я допустил ошибку в диагностике, приведшую к тяжелым последствиям, а затем к его смерти. Злого умысла в моих действиях не было.[21]

Translated:

> I admit that it was my fault that A.A. Zhdanov's life was shortened. In the course of treating him I made a mistake in diagnosis which led to serious consequences and then to his death. There was no evil intent in my actions.

Therefore there really was a "doctors' plot" against Zhdanov in 1948! Vinogradov admitted that the consulting doctors ignored the findings and recommendation of the cardiologist, Dr. Timashuk. The only question is whether Vinogradov and the others did this, as Vinogradov claimed, to "hide my mistake in order to protect myself and those who had taken part in Zhdanov's treatment,"[22] or whether they had deliberately killed Zhdanov.

Understandably, the Soviet investigators had to investigate the latter possibility. The job of policemen is to be suspicious. If medical doctors in the United States today were to make such an admission they would certainly be stripped of their licenses to practice medicine and face criminal prosecution and civil lawsuits.

Snyder must have known this since both Brent/Naumov and Kostyrchenko relate it. Moreover, many of the primary sources, including this document, have been publicly available for years.

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[21] At http://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/69180

[22] «...чтобы скрыть свою ошибку, выгородить себя и принимавших участие в лечении А.А. Жданова...» ; see document at previous footnote.

But Snyder failed to tell his readers the facts about this important question.

Did Stalin Order the Doctors To Be Beaten in 1952?

> In autumn 1952 several more Soviet doctors were under investigation. None of them had anything to do with Zhdanov or Shcherbakov, but they had treated other Soviet and foreign communist dignitaries before their deaths. One of them was Stalin's personal doctor, who had advised him to retire in early 1952. At Stalin's express and repeated orders, these people were beaten terribly...[46] (365)

Source (n. 46 p. 503): "Quotation: Brent, *Plot*, 250."

Snyder gives no evidence for the claim that Stalin ordered the doctors to be beaten. Neither do Brent and Naumov, who state that "the doctors were 'beaten to a pulp'" but give no reference.

This opens up an interesting mystery. On August 22, 2011, a purported letter to Beria from Sergei A. Goglidze, Deputy head of the MVD at the time and dated March 26, 1953, was published by "Memorial Society" official and researcher Nikita Petrov in *Novaia Gazeta*.[23] This is an ideologically anticommunist newspaper of which Mikhail Gorbachev is part owner along with a Russian billionaire, while "Memorial" is a highly anticommunist research institution. Neither has any reputation for historical objectivity. In this letter Goglidze supposedly claimed that Stalin himself had told him to beat suspects "with deadly beatings."

Is this document genuine? Petrov claims that he found it "in the 1990s" but does not explain why he waited until 2011 to publish it. It is not mentioned in the "Memorial"-sponsored volume *Lavrentii Beria*, Part I, published in 1991, where Documents 5 and

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[23] Nikita Petrov. "Zavety Stalina: 'Bit', bit', smertnym boem bit'!" - Никита Петров. Заветы Сталина: «Бить, бить, смертным боем бить!» http://www.novayagazeta.ru/gulag/48143.html For some reason Petrov published only excerpts from this letter. The whole text is available at http://perpetrator2004.narod.ru/documents/DoctorsPlot/StalinDocsDP.doc

6 deal with the "Doctors Plot." Nor is it in the 1085-page volume of Beria-related documents published in 2012.[24] Petrov quoted from it in an earlier article in *Novaia Gazeta* of October 16, 2008, but did not publish it at that time. Instead, he published an often-reprinted reproduction the so-called "torture telegram" of January 10, 1939, along with a handwritten facsimile of a letter from Semion Ignat'ev to Stalin of November 15, 1952 that does not mention beatings.

All this raises suspicion about whether this document is genuine. Even if it is, the further question is: was Goglidze telling the truth? The truth is: it is impossible to say. Anti-Stalinists have every reason to fabricate documents to make Stalin look bad, and have done so. Goglidze, if he did write this letter, had every reason to pass the blame for mistreatment of the doctor-prisoners onto the dead Stalin, since doing so might help him avoid punishment (Goglidze was one of six MGB officers shot in December 1953 for their association with Lavrentii Beria).The historian's dictum "Testis unus — testis nullus" applies here too; one "witness" is never enough to establish a fact. Source criticism, an obligation for every responsible historian, is essential here — and once again Snyder fails to give us any.

Snyder also fails to inform his readers of this passage in his daughter's memoir:

> The "case of the Kremlin doctors" was under way that last winter. My father's housekeeper told me not long ago that my father was exceedingly distressed at the turn events took. She heard it discussed at the dinner table. She was waiting on the table, as usual, when my father remarked that he didn't believe the doctors were "dishonest" and that the only evidence against them, after all, was the "reports" of Dr. Timashuk.[25] (Emphasis added)

Snyder quotes Svetlana Allilueva's memoirs elsewhere, so why not here? Obviously because *this* quotation would cast doubt on

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[24] *Politbiuro i delo Beria. Sbornik dokumentov.* Moscow: Kuchkovo Pole, 2012.

[25] *Twenty Letters to a Friend*, p. 207.

Stalin's guilt in the "Doctors' Plot" case. Brent/Naumov also fail to cite this passage, no doubt for the same reason.

We have seen above that Snyder quotes from Svetlana Allilueva's writings — but only when they have an anti-Stalin tendency. When they do not or, as here, when they contradict an anti-communist story, Snyder ignores them. This is not the way a historian is supposed to act. Snyder is writing not history but "anticommunist propaganda with footnotes."

Snyder Falsifies Stalin's Words

Snyder states:

> Stalin, a sick man of seventy-three, listening to no counsel but his own, pushed forward. In December 1952 he said that "every Jew is a nationalist and an agent of American intelligence," a paranoid formulation even by his standards.[49] (366)

Source (n. 49 p. 503): "For "every Jew...," see Rubenstein, *Pogrom*, 62."

Rubenstein does have this quotation — but it is a lie. Rubenstein refers to the source, the memoirs of Minister Malyshev about a December 1 1952 meeting during which Stalin said:

> Любой еврей-националист, это агент америк[анской] разведки. Евреи-нац[ионалисты] считают, что их нацию спасли США (там можно стать богачом, буржа и т.д.)

Translated:

> Every Jewish nationalist is an agent of American intelligence. Jewish nationalists consider that their nation was saved by the USA (there one can become rich, a bourgeois, etc.)
>
> - *Istochnik* 5 (1997), 140-1.

By "Jewish nationalist" Stalin clearly means "Zionist." Since April 2008 there has even been an Internet page exposing this misquotation, which it attributes to Brent and Naumov. But as recently as

April 2012 Snyder was repeating this false quotation in the standard talk he was giving about *Bloodlands*.[26]

Snyder is either deliberately lying or never bothered to check the source of this quotation. Whatever is the case, it does him no credit as a historian.

Anything To Make Stalin Appear Anti-Semitic? Snyder Falsifies the Draft Letter

Snyder writes:

> In February 1953, the Soviet leadership was drafting and redrafting a collective Jewish self-denunciation, including phrases that might have come straight from Nazi propaganda. It was to be signed by prominent Soviet Jews and published in *Pravda*. Vasily Grossman was among those intimidated into signing the letter....[52] (367)

Sources (n. 52 p. 504):

> * "On the drafting and redrafting, see Kostyrchenko, *Gosudarstvennyi antisemitizm* , 470-478."
>
> * "On Grossman, see Brandenberger, "Last Crime," 196.
>
> * "See also Luks, "Brüche," 47."

In an article published in 2009, when *Bloodlands* must have been nearing completion, Snyder wrote:

> In early 1953, the Soviet leadership was circulating a petition among prominent Soviet Jews, who were to apologize to Russians for claiming that Jews had suffered, and thank Russians for saving them." (note to Kostyrchenko, *Gosudarstvennyi antisemitizm*... 470-478.) (2009-4)

Snyder's characterization of the unpublished letter is false. The letter in question says nothing whatsoever about any apology, to Russians or to anyone else. It says nothing about "claiming that

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[26]See http://holocaustcontroversies.blogspot.com/2006/04/correction-corner-1-every-jew-is.html When Snyder repeated this lie during his talk on April 17, 2012 at Kean University I called from the floor: "That's not true!" Snyder's reply was "Yeah, sure!"

Jews had suffered." It says nothing about "thanking Russians" — or anybody — "for saving them." It does not contain any "Jewish self-denunciation," whatever that might mean. It contains no "phrases that might have come straight from Nazi propaganda."

Of course, Snyder's readers will have no idea that he is lying — and here I say "lying" advisedly, because it is not credible that Snyder has simply failed to read the letter himself. But Snyder's readers will not have read the letter. What's more, Snyder has failed to inform them where they might read it. The first draft of the letter in question is translated into English in Brent/Naumov (300-305). Snyder cites this book. But Snyder does not inform his readers that they can read this letter there. Could that be because anyone who does read the letter would see that Snyder is not being truthful about it?

Nor was it "the Soviet leadership" that was circulating this letter. Dmitrii Shepilov, one of the Secretaries of the CPSU, and N.A. Mikhailov, head of the Agitprop section of the Party, sent it to Malenkov, who was in the leadership of the Party, the Politburo. Neither Shepilov nor Mikhailov was in the "Soviet leadership." After criticism by Il'ia Erenburg a second draft was sent to Mikhailov by Shepilov but never circulated farther, much less printed.

Here is what Lazar Kaganovich told Feliks Chuev about this letter:

> Когда Михайлов принес мне бумагу для публикации против этих врачей - я вам рассказываю кое-что личное - по еврейскому вопросу, и там были подписи Рейзена и многих других еврейских деятелей. Михайлов был секретарем ЦК, потом министром культуры. Я ему сказал: «Я не подпишу».
>
> - А что, там осуждали их?
>
> - Да, да. Он говорит: «Как? Мне товарищ Сталин поручил."- Скажите товарищу Сталину, что я не подпишу. Я ему сам объясню.
>
> Когда я пришел, Сталин меня спрашивает: «Почему вы не подписали?» Я говорю: «Я член Политбюро ЦК КПСС, а не еврейский

общественный деятель, и буду подписывать бумагу как член Политбюро. Давайте такую бумагу я напишу, а как еврейский общественный деятель не буду подписывать. Я не еврейский общественный деятель!»

Сталин внимательно на меня посмотрел: «Ладно, хорошо».

Я говорю: «Если нужно, я напишу, статью, от себя».

«Посмотрим, может, надо будет и статью написать»[27]

Translated:

When Mikhailov brought me the paper for publication against these doctors — I am telling you something personal — concerning the Jewish question, there were the signatures of Reizen and of many other Jewish figures. Mikhailov was a secretary of the Central Committee, and then Minister of Culture. I told him: "I will not sign it."

- What? Are you condemning them?

- Yes, yes. He said: "What? Comrade Stalin gave me this." — Tell comrade Stalin that I will not sign it. I will explain it to him myself.

When I arrived, Stalin asked me. "Why didn't you sign?" I said: "I am a member of the Politburo of the CC of the CPSU, and not a Jewish public figure, and I will sign papers as a member of the Politburo. Give me a paper like this and I will sign it, but I will not sign as a Jewish public figure. I am not a Jewish public figure."

Stalin looked attentively at me. "OK, that's fine."

I said: "If necessary, I will write an article of my own."

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[27] Feliks Chuev, *Tak govoril Kaganovich*. Moscow: Otechestvo, 1992, p. 174.

> "Let's see, maybe we'll need you to write an article."

There is no evidence that Vasili Grossman was "intimidated into signing the letter." His signature simply appears alongside those of many others. **Brandenberger** cites no evidence that Grossman was "coerced." Nor does it seem likely. Judging from his novels, at this time Grossman was making great efforts to be a loyal communist.

> In vicious press attacks, it suddenly emerged that his [Grossman's — GF] recently published novel of the war, *For a Just Cause*, was not patriotic enough. *For a Just Cause* was a vast novel of the Battle of Stalingrad, mostly within Stalinist conventions. (367)

Several of these criticisms are available online. None of them are "vicious," though some are sharp. Their main point is that Grossman's novel is not Marxist enough for a Party member.[28]

Snyder: Rumors Are History — Almost

Snyder writes:

> Judging **by the rumors circulating at the time**, Soviet citizens had no trouble imagining the possible outcomes: doctors would have been show-tried with Soviet leaders who were their supposed allies; remaining Jews would have been purged from the state police and the armed forces; the thirty-five thousand Soviet Jewish doctors (and perhaps scientists as well) might have been deported to camps; and perhaps even the Jewish people as such would have been subject to forced removal or even mass shootings.[54] (368, emphasis added)

It is true that rumors like this circulated at the time in the USSR. Today in the USA rumors are circulating that Israel had advance warning of the 9/11 terrorist attack; that the attack was permitted, maybe even planned, by the Bush Administration itself; that

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[28] At http://www.hrono.ru/dokum/195_dok/19530324gross.html

the Twin Towers were demolished not by the jetliners' impacts but by explosive charges carefully placed in advance, etc.

In other words, rumor is not history — far from it! There are plenty of rumors in Russia today that reflect very positively on Stalin. Of course, Snyder ignores them. For Snyder, rumor only belongs in an historical work when that rumor conforms to his own prejudices.

Snyder has to know, but does not tell his readers, that Gennady Kostyrchenko, anticommunist, Zionist, and hater of Stalin, has long since disproved the stories about a "planned deportation of Jews." Kostyrchenko's article is titled "Deportatsiia — Mistifikatsiia", and one does not need to know Russian to understand its meaning [29] Snyder also fails to inform his readers that in his book *Stalin i evreiskaia problema* ("Stalin and the Jewish Problem," 2003) Zhores Medvedev writes:

> Можно предположить, что Сталин позвонил в «Правду» либо вечером 27 февраля, либо утром 28 февраля и распорядился прекратить публикацию антиеврейских материалов и всех других статей, связанных с «делом врачей...."
>
> В Советском Союзе в это время был только один человек, который мог простым телефонным звонком редактору «Правды» или в Агитпроп ЦК КПСС изменить официальную политику. Это мог сделать только Сталин. (216-7)

Translated:

> We can assume that Stalin called Pravda either on the evening of February 27 or in the morning of February 28 and arranged for the cessation of publication of anti-Jewish materials and of all other articles dealing with the "Doctors' Plot."...

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[29] See his articles "Депортация - мистификация," Лехаим, 9/ 2002, at http://www.lechaim.ru/ARHIV/125/kost.htm ; also in Вопросы Истории 1 (2003), 92-113.

> In the Soviet Union at that time there was only one person who was able, with a single telephone call to the editor of Pravda or to the Department of Agitprop of the CC CPSU to change official policy. Only Stalin could do that...

In their collection of essays *The Unknown Stalin* Zhores and his brother Roi Medvedev come to a similar conclusion:

> We still have no way of knowing exactly how the anti-Semitic campaign was stopped on 1 March or who was ultimately responsible. ... It is clear, however, that the end of the propaganda campaign was associated with a decision to abandon preparations for the trial of the doctors. The actual order could only have come from Ignatiev. It is also conceivable, however, that Stalin had given the instruction himself on 27 or 28 February.[30]

It appears more than unlikely that Ignatiev would have sent such an order without at least obtaining Stalin's approval. The Medvedev volumes are very well known but Snyder does not mention these passages. Incompetence? Or deliberate deceit?